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MONSIEUR TIERNEY WAS SITTING ON THE HALF-DEAD LIMB, AND EDGING HIS WAY OUT TOWARD
THE END OF IT.

The Champion Texan Rider;

OR,

RED BUFFALO,

AND THE HUNTER HERCULES.

A Tale of the Comanches.

BY HARRY ST. GEORGE.

CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG HUNTER'S FIRST PRIZE.

It was a beautiful scene. Not a cloud marred the vast blue dome of Heaven. Autumn reigned supreme in the Lone Star State, where brave Houston fought, and valiant Bowie fell at the Alamo. Near the Comanche ground on the northwestern border of the State we would bring the reader on this bright, cheerful morning in October.

The prairie which, a month or two before, had presented a beautiful aspect of flowers and green grass, had been literally baked to a rich brown color, and, moved by the breeze that was blowing the long, dry grass, looked for all the world like the waves of the ocean or an inland sea.

Riding leisurely across the prairie was a young man of about twenty-two or three. He wore a complete suit of fine buckskin, which, it was apparent, had been made by a "regular" tailor, for it bore none of the marks which almost always distinguish the clothes of the old trapper.

The suit was beautifully made and ornamented, and truly became the fine form of the owner. The head-covering of the young equestrian was a large felt, which kept the sun from his face and might prove almost as effective as an umbrella, in case of a shower.

The face underneath the hat was a resolute one.

The eyes were gray and piercing; the nose, rather large and slightly inclined to the Roman, but was perfect for all that; the cheek-bones high and the mouth firm.

On his upper lip the rider sported a fine mustache, and taken altogether, he was a very good-looking fellow.

The form of the young hunter was not large, but there appeared to be a vast amount of strength in that well-knit frame.

The horse upon which he was seated was a large bay, the exquisite shape of whose limbs proved that it was a good runner. The horse had indeed been selected on account of its speed, and could show a clean pair of heels to ninety-nine out of a hundred of its fellows.

The arms of the young man consisted of a light rifle which he carried across the pommel of his saddle, a pair of revolvers in his belt, and, keeping them company was a sharp, two-edged hunting-knife. Although a stranger on the plains of the Great West, Chauncy Branrere was no novice in the art of hunting. He could bring down a deer as well as the most experienced hunter. His hand was steady, and his eye quick and sure.

He was the only son of a wealthy citizen of

New York, and had made this trip to the Southwest in a spirit of adventure. Chauncy had traveled over Europe, had hunted in Asia, Africa and South America, and was now to satisfy his love of the wild excitements of the chase by a season in the Southwest.

Chauncy had intended to secure an old hunter for a guide, who was an old friend of his father's. Many years before, the two had fought in the Mexican war, side by side, and the hunter's life had been saved by his comrade in arms, which made them good friends. After the war, Chauncy's father returned to his home in the North, and several times received scrawling letters from the old hunter, but the two had never seen each other since their parting.

Disappointed in meeting the old Texan, Chauncy had started out alone, determined that he would not wait in the little border town for the old ranger's return.

He had a mission to accomplish, if possible, for he had not come out for the hunting alone. An uncle had died and left two-thirds of his estate, which was large, to an adopted son, and the other third to Chauncy. This adopted son having had a quarrel with the uncle had gone "out West." No one had heard of him for years, and it was not an unlikely thing for him to be dead.

Mr. Branrere was to institute a search for him and if he was not found at the end of a year, then the former was to assume possession of the fortune bequeathed to the missing man.

The horse of the young man was approaching one of the numerous "mottes" of trees which spot the prairies of Texas. Suddenly he started and looked around.

It was a sound which, in any place would have awakened all that was chivalrous in his nature. It was a cry for help, and it was a woman's voice!

It came from the trees, not once but twice—thrice, and without hesitation the young hunter dashed his spurs into the sides of his horse, when, like a flash, the noble animal darted forward and in a moment reached the trees.

Throwing himself from his horse, Chauncy rushed in among the undergrowth rifle in hand. He reached the edge of a small glade with a few bounds, and a thrilling sight was before him.

On a limb of a tree opposite to him was a large panther flattened out for a leap. Not five yards from the tree was a young girl, her face blanched with terror!

CHAPTER II.

THE KNIGHT AND THE "LADIE FAIR."

A PANTHER and its prey!

A panther and its foe!

Quickly raising his rifle the young man, with nerves as steady as steel and lips compressed with a fierce courage, took a quick aim and the hammer fell. Then a sharp, whip-like crack, and, with a scream that seemed half-human, the panther gave a leap from the tree, straight toward the girl, but, impelled by agony and a baffled purpose, the leap sent him several feet past the crouching figure of the maid.

Chauncy had expected this, and before the animal could turn he was upon it, knife in hand.

A few stabs sufficed to let out the little life that was in the panther, and then Chauncy arose to his feet.

Wiping his bloody knife upon the body of the slain creature, he put that weapon back into his belt.

Then for the first time he turned his eyes upon the maiden he had saved. A cry of surprise and admiration came from his lips as his eyes fell upon her. She was now upon her feet. Large, flashing black eyes, a pearl-like forehead, chin and nose, an exquisitely molded mouth, all framed with silky black hair which reached far below her waist!

Such was the picture before the young man.

The wild look was still in her eyes as she turned them upon her rescuer.

"I hope you have not received any hurt," said he, advancing.

"No, sir; thanks to your timely arrival I have escaped from a fearful death. Oh, sir, you must excuse me if I do not thank you sufficiently. What I have gone through has unnerved me," said the fair girl, in a voice which to Chauncy seemed the sweetest he had ever heard in all his life.

"Any one would have done the same," he said.

This seems to be the regular programme on such occasions, and Chauncy followed the general rule, most probably because he knew nothing else that would be so appropriate.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but any one would not have done what you have," replied the other.

"Then he would have been nothing but a brute. I had hardly time to aim and fire, but I am sure that had I seen your face I would never have shot the panther," exclaimed Chauncy.

"And why not?" questioned the beautiful maiden.

"Because I could not have taken my eyes off of it! You must pardon me if I seem rude, but the truth is, I am surprised at seeing a woman out here, and a young and beautiful one at that."

"It does not matter, sir. If you are surprised at seeing me here I must confess that I am equally surprised at your sudden appearance. I had no idea a human being, except it be Comanches, was within twenty miles of this spot, and they are as bad as the panther. You must know, then, that I was very much astonished when you fired your gun."

Chauncy did not have to remain long in suspense, for she told her story in a very few words.

Her name was Donna Iola, and she was the daughter of an American who had married a Mexican. She had been out riding and had been captured by a band of Comanches, under the chief Red Buffalo. They had taken her north to their village, and from thence, in the night, she managed to escape on one of the mustangs.

It was the second night before. Upon reaching the grove of trees she had entered and tied her horse, while she searched around for berries or something to eat. It was then that the panther had come upon her.

Knowing that she must be hungry, the young hunter left her for awhile, but returned ere long

with a brace of birds which with a true hunter's skill he prepared for the spit. Then a fire was kindled, and in due time the savory repast was ready.

They were not long in dispatching this, and then, after a good drink of water from the cool spring, the Donna declared herself ready for her ride homeward.

Of course Chauncy had resolved to accompany her to the hacienda of her father, and the two started off, going in a southerly direction.

As they rode along, Chauncy noticed that the Donna's horse seemed quite tired, and he decided to stop at the next clump of trees they came to.

It was nearly three hours before they reached this, and then they were amply repaid for their trouble, for in the cool, shady grove was a spring of water.

The two horses were tied to trees, and then the two young people wandered about among the trees, talking and laughing.

Had the hunter been an old hand at Indian-fighting he would never have idled the precious time away in this manner.

That the Comanches would follow up the Donna's trail was a sure thing, and delay was dangerous.

But entirely unconscious of what they were doing, the two remained in the grove for several hours.

Dinner was eaten, and then they prepared to depart about the middle of the afternoon.

The air was rather cool now, and they enjoyed the ride very much. The horse that the Donna rode was a little refreshed by the rest, and could no doubt hold out until evening.

They had not gone a mile from the grove when Chauncy heard the sound of horses' hoofs pounding upon the ground behind him, and turning in his saddle he saw to his extreme astonishment and chagrin, a band of Comanches coming after them.

They had tracked the Donna Iola to the grove, and were now following her.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMANCHES' PRIZE.

CHAUNCY could not help wondering why he had not seen the Indians before. The truth of it, however, was, that he had not been on the lookout for them and hence did not see them.

They had come up to the grove, and when the young man first heard and saw them, were just coming out from among the trees. This was a sudden and startling interruption to the *tete-a-tete* he was having with the Donna Iola.

A word sufficed to explain to the Donna the cause of his pale face. Chauncy had no fear for himself. He was mounted on a fast horse and could have escaped in a trice, but he would sooner cut off his right hand than desert his fair companion.

The mustang was put to its fastest speed, and for a mile managed to keep its distance. Then the Indians began gaining, at first slowly and then more rapidly, until at length Chauncy saw that in fifteen minutes more the Comanches would overtake them. What then would be their fate?

He most probably would be burned at the

stake, while the Donna would become the squaw of the chief, Red Buffalo.

How could they escape?

Suddenly he thought of his horse. Not one of the Comanches could overtake the "Ranger," as his steed was called.

One only could escape, and that one must be the Donna Iola.

The exchange of horses only took a few seconds, but during that time the Indians gained upon them considerably.

The Donna did not know what Chauncy meant by changing horses, and when he told her of his plan she refused right up and down to desert him. Chauncy knew how to bring her round, however. He told her that if both were captured there was no chance for escape, whereas, if one got off, that one could bring assistance, and thus both would escape.

The Donna saw that this was a fact, and gave her consent to go, but she resolved to stick to Chauncy until the last moment.

The Comanches, led by Red Buffalo himself, came rushing on like a whirlwind, uttering loud yells now and then.

They felt sure that the two fugitives were as good as in their power, and why should they not?

Were they not gaining rapidly on them, and was not one of the horses giving out? Red Buffalo had begun to despair about ever finding the young Donna, and now that she seemed within his grasp, he began to feel a fierce joy.

She would never escape from him again if he once got her to the Indian village. The sharp young girl had drugged the squaw in whose charge she had been given, and while the latter was sleeping had made her escape, taking some food and a horse with her. Unluckily for her (though an excellent judge of horses) she happened in the darkness to get a poor steed out of the horse-corral, and now the horse was breaking down.

At length Chauncy told the Donna that she must leave him at once if she hoped to escape. If the Indians got close up and she tried to make off on the bay steed, they would fire, not at her but her horse, and would in all probability wound or kill him. In either case, the Donna would be captured, and then there would be no chance for them, for none could know that they were prisoners in the Indian village.

The Donna could not but obey the words of the young man. A word from Chauncy sent the bay horse forward with a dash. Off he went like an arrow shot from a bow. The Donna, as she left Chauncy, turned in the saddle and cast a glance of sorrow and something else at the young man.

Even in this critical moment, Chauncy felt a thrill of joy run through his form, for by that look he realized that he was beloved by the beautiful young Donna.

Such a world of feeling as there was in those large black eyes.

Love and sorrow mingled with reproach. The former because she had to leave him, and the latter because he had sent her from him. Chauncy knew that it was for the best, and but for this he would have recalled the Donna to his side.

It pained him greatly to be separated from the young girl in this manner, and naturally he felt kind of mad at those who had been the cause of it.

The Indians gave vent to a yell of rage when they saw the noble bay steed dart off with his light but unwilling burden.

They urged their horses on to as fast a speed as they could, but it was no use. The Donna went five yards to their three, and easily distanced them.

Chauncy took a last look at the fast-receding form of the Donna, and then turned his attention to the mustang.

He saw a grove of trees not far to the southwest, and heading his horse toward these he rode forward.

Chauncy was a splendid horseman, and knew all of the tricks that class of men use to keep up the speed of their horses. By sundry tricks he managed to increase the speed of his horse so much that it held its own against the better and fresher horses of the Comanches. The latter were in a bad enough humor at the escape of the Donna, and the sight of the young hunter keeping the same distance away from them infuriated them.

They thought that he was going to escape, and resolved that he would never get off alive. They would rather kill him on the spot than that this should happen.

A volley of bullets were sent after him, but none touched the hunter, although several whizzed past him in rather close proximity. His horse was not so lucky, however.

One of the bullets struck it, and the poor animal reeled and staggered for a moment before falling to the ground.

There was no need of this. The Comanches ought to have known that the speed which the hunter had got out of his horse was its last efforts, and in all probability it would have dropped down after reaching the trees.

Chauncy, with an active leap, managed to get off from the horse without getting his horse upon his legs.

He did not stop an instant after putting his feet upon *terra firma*, but made tracks for the trees, using all the speed he could command. The Indians dashed after him, but they were too late to catch him.

He reached the trees, and, jumping quickly behind one, turned and presented his rifle at the foe.

There was only one man, and twenty Comanches are not in the habit of stopping when this is the case.

So the Indians kept on, although they felt sure that some were rushing to their death.

Crack! went the rifle of the young hunter, and obeying the sharp and decisive summons, the Indian nearest Red Buffalo started on his way to the red-man's "happy hunting-grounds."

This was quick work, but the rest of the Indians did not hang back. The hunter's rifle was empty now, and they must give him no time to load up. They did not know that Chauncy had not the least idea of loading up his gun.

Crack! crack! went the only revolver Chauncy had with him, the other being in the holster at his saddle-bow.

Again the deadly revolver sounded, and still another Indian threw up his hands and fell from the back of his horse.

Chauncy was making deadly work among the foe with his single revolver. At length it was empty, and the Indians all around him on foot, they having thrown themselves from their horses.

With his discharged revolver, Chauncy gave one of the red villains a hard blow in the stomach, and then he had to defend himself. Bravely and manfully did he fight against the crowd of Indians, but with all his courage he knew that there was no chance of escape. At length he was overpowered by numbers, thrown down and his hands bound behind him. His knife was red with the blood of several of the Comanches, and the wounded ones cast glances of hatred at him as their movements caused their cuts to hurt.

The Comanches then looked round upon the scene.

Five men were dead, while others were wounded more or less, and as they wanted to get away from this spot as soon as possible, the dead were buried, and then mounting Chauncy on one of the slain warriors' horses, the whole band set off.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO WIZARDS.

CHAUNCY swept the prairie with his eyes in the direction the Donna had gone, but she was not in sight. A feeling of joy went through him, for he knew that she had escaped.

The Indians went straight for their village, but had not gone many miles before darkness came on.

The moon did not rise until late, but when she did, it was to light up the earth almost as well as the sun would have done. The Indians halted and ate their supper when it was dark, and let their horses rest for several hours.

When the moon put in an appearance in the east, they mounted their horses and set out for the village.

Hour after hour passed away, and it was nearly daybreak before they at length reached the village of the Comanches.

The tired horses knew by instinct that they were near home, and they whinnied their approbation and delight.

The Comanches themselves were not less glad, for they had been absent two days and two nights, and the greater part of that time had been spent in riding.

The village was quiet when they reached it, but it did not remain so long. Horses neighed, dogs barked, warriors yelled, papposes screamed, and women did anything and everything.

The prisoner was immediately thrust into a lodge and a guard set over him. Chauncy had had no sleep that night, and yet he could not shut his eyes now. So restless was he that he could not lay down, but with scheming brain he walked across his narrow prison, time after time.

Many plans for his escape suggested themselves, but he could do nothing with his hands tied behind him, and, notwithstanding all of

his desperate efforts, he could not get them loose.

Then his mind turned to the Donna.

He wondered if she would get any aid. Chauncy knew that her father, the Don, was a property owner, and that he had peons and *vaqueros* under him. The Donna had told him that her father had undoubtedly come after her with his men.

She might meet them on her way and bring them to his rescue. And again the chances were about equal that she might miss them, and even if she did get them, would they attack the Indian village on account of a man whom they had never seen?

Chauncy had heard his father speak of the Mexicans so often and in such disparaging terms that the young man had come to think them all first-class cowards.

He did not know that, though taken as a class, they are cowards, yet among them are many brave men.

Every nation has its defects, and in some this one is greater than in others. The young man managed to think of a good deal in the short time that intervened between his being thrust into the lodge and daybreak.

The Comanches did not know that in the grove, about half a mile from the village, a man mounted on a beautiful snow-white horse, was watching them as they entered the village with their prisoner. The man was not a bad-looking fellow, and was about thirty years old. The horse would have excited the envy of any man, especially a Comanche, who can judge horses so well.

Faultless in the shape and symmetry of its limbs, with a full, broad chest, arched neck, perfect head, large eyes, long mane and tail, the animal presented a splendid sight to the beholder.

There was no saddle on its back, only a broad band of dark-blue cloth, about four inches wide.

The bridle was a strong and beautiful one, silver-mounted and evidently worth a good deal of money.

On the horse, back of the band, was a bundle of what seemed to be clothes. The man carried a rifle in his hand, and in his belt were two revolvers, the accouterments to the former being in their places.

The man was muttering to himself as he watched the Indians go past.

"The poor fellow," said he; "he's doomed to the stake. I came out here for adventures and fun, and now I have a chance for both and to do a good deed at the same time. As sure as my name is Barry Le Clare, the champion bare-back rider, jumper, *et cetera*, I'll do it. What d'ye say, Snow Cloud; shall we put up our posters, announcing that we will give an exhibition free to-morrow?" turning, as he spoke, to his horse.

The intelligent animal seemed to understand every word that was spoken, and gave a low whinny as it rubbed its velvety muzzle against the cheek of its master.

His words explained the strange appearance of the horse, and also the bundle on its back. The man had been a circus actor all his life, and

having made lots of money, and saved it, too, he had with his celebrated horse left the circus life and come out West to enjoy himself. He could not bear a saddle, even if the horse would have one on, which it certainly would not, having an antipathy against them.

Just at break of day, while Barry, as we must call him, was still cogitating, leaning on his beautiful steed, he heard more yells in the village, and knew that one or more new prisoners had been brought in. Who they were he knew not, for he could not see them, as they had entered the village from the opposite side.

He resolved, however, to try and save them all, and after making this resolve he left his horse's side, taking the bundle from his back, and began to change his clothes.

Fifteen minutes passed away, and then a horseman emerged from the grove of trees and began to ride toward the village.

He was at once discovered by the Comanches, and the whole village was soon staring at him.

And indeed he did present a curious sight.

He was attired in regular circus costume, tights of flesh-colored stuff being on his body and limbs, and the blue cloth covered with spangles about his loins. He wore a jaunty cap, and his curly black hair was put back behind his ears.

The white horse was the same as before, only it carried no bundle.

The clothes of the circus-rider had been left in the woods, together with his rifle, revolvers and knife.

On his feet, in place of the fashionable boots he had on before, were a pair of pumps, such as the bareback riders use.

The Indians were greatly astonished at this sight.

As the horseman came nearer and nearer they thought he looked like a maniac, and yet again the smile which, notwithstanding all his efforts to repress it, came to his face when he saw the startled looks of the Indians, went far to convince them that he was sane. He rode slowly into the village until he came to the center.

Here he stopped his horse and sat upon him, looking around him at the crowd of dusky faces that were upturned in wonder.

At length the chief, Red Buffalo, came up, and not knowing whether the new-comer was a crazy man whom he must respect, or some pale-face making fun of him and his warriors whom he must capture, he asked him what he meant by coming into the village.

"What has come upon the Comanches, that they recognize not the agent of the Manitou? I am the White Wizard, and am in communication with the Great Manitou," said the other, in deep tones.

The Indians were about to believe this, and it would have been an easy thing for them to do so, as the curious garb of the rider made them feel sure that he was no common man, but at this instant the magician of the village, a tall, bony man, dressed in skins and having a terribly ugly face, stepped out.

"The pale-face lies. He is an impostor. None but Muchanaigo can hold communication with the Manitou. Last night I had a dream; I dreamt that a lying pale-face came into the vil-

lage to try and rescue the prisoners, and he was burned at the stake with them. Warriors, seize the coward. It is Muchanaigo that speaks. He must be obeyed, or a curse will fall upon the Comanches.

With a yell the warriors sprung forward to obey the Wizard.

"Hold," cried a voice, which seemed to come from the blue sky above. "Let not a warrior lay a hand upon the White Wizard. He who but touches him dies by the lightning. Beware! Let Muchanaigo kneel or he will be taken away by the wind and cast into the den of snakes which is kept for false wizards."

Horror-stricken, the Red Wizard fell upon his knees. Here was one who was greater than himself, and to whom he must bend his knee. Many of the Indians followed his example, for they thought that when their Wizard was scared, it was time for them to be humble.

CHAPTER V.

TWO QUEER MEN.

CHAUNCY heard a commotion in the village shortly after daybreak. Soon the door of the lodge was opened and a couple of men who had their hands tied behind them just as he did, were thrust in.

They did not see Chauncy, who was standing in a corner of the lodge. They had just come in from the light, and could not see in the dim room for several moments. Chauncy could see them plainly, however, and he saw that there was a slight difference in size between the two men. One was about six feet three, while the other could not be over five feet at the most.

The first was a trapper, being dressed in tanned buckskin, while the second man was clothed in a suit of broadcloth.

Who were those two men, who seemed so entirely opposite?

Chauncy did not ask the question. There was no need of it, for as the little man entered the lodge, urged on by the foot of the Indian guard, he immediately staggered and fell on his back. Struggling to his feet he turned his back to that of his comrade.

"*Sacre*," cried the little man, in unmistakably French accents. "It is von shame to throw a citizen of la belle France about in that way. I s'all complain to de emperor an' he will adjust de difficulty. If you please, monsieur, I would be much obliged if you give my back von leetle scratch. It feels itchy."

"Why, you frog-eating Parley Voo. D'ye think I'm a scratchin'-post? I didn't hire out fur that. Ye ought to know Ralph Bison better nor that. Go an' scratch yer pesky back ag'in' the side o' the lodge," exclaimed the other, in a sour tone.

"*Diable!* your advice is good, monsieur, and I s'all follow out von glorious idea. I may rub a hole through the vall an' we s'all escape," and the little Frenchman was about to do what he said, despite the laughter of his comrade, when the voice of Chauncy made one straighten his face and the other forget the itch in his back.

"So this is Ralph Bison, is it?" asked the young hunter.

"Yas, I'm the feller ye mention, commonly called," said the trapper, recovering from his

surprise at being addressed, when he thought he and the Frenchman were alone.

"Well," said Chauncy, "I wanted to get you to go out on the plains with me, but I found you had gone off with a naturalist, and I suppose monsieur must be the gentleman," with a bow in that direction.

"*Parbleu!* but you are quite right, monsieur. I am sure it is von happy meeting. I'm from France, and am Monsieur Tierney."

"And I am Chauncy Branrare, of New York," said the other.

"What's that, boyee? Air ye any relation to Capten Branrare that fit in the Mexican war?" questioned the trapper.

"He is my father. He told me to hunt you up, Ralph, and though I expected to see you before I went East again, yet I assure you I had no expectation that we would meet thus."

"Yer hand, boyee. So ye are the Cap's son. Come over ter the light. Dang it if you don't look just like him now. But how in the mischief did ye come hyar? Reds caught ye a-nappin', I guess."

"Not much," returned our hero, and he then proceeded to tell his story.

The hunter's eyes opened wide when he learned that Chauncy had killed five of the Comanches before he was captured.

"Yer hand ag'in, boyee. Ye beat yer daddy. Why, I only knocked over three, and the Frenchy nearly killed one wid his umbrella afore they got us," said Ralph.

"Oh, mine poor umbrella. It is von shame for the noble red-men to take it from me. I have been to Africa, and half-vay around de world, an' de umbrella vas vith me alvays. I s'all certainly complain ven I get home," said Monsieur Tierney.

"But ye'll never git home, Parley Voo. The reds intend ter roast ye an' have some fun out o' ye," said Ralph.

"*Mon Dieu!* but de red-men vill not do dat. Dey vill no hurt a poor Frenchman. Begar, I vill send von complaint to de emperor, an' den I vill get away. Now vat you think, monsieur?"

"I think ye'r a durned fool, thet's what I think. We are lookin' death in the face now, an' things look bad fur us."

"What's all that row about, boyee? Thar's somethin' up," said the hunter, as he walked over to the window.

Upon looking out he could at first see nothing, but soon the circus-rider, mounted on his snow-white horse, and followed by the Indians, came in sight.

Ralph knew not what to make of it, and he called his comrades to his side. The three looked out of the small barred aperture, and Chauncy saw at a glance what the man was.

The Frenchman understood him when he mentioned what the rider was, but Ralph had to have it explained to him.

"But what was the man doing here?"

He did not seem to be a captive, neither did he seem to belong to the village. It was an enigma that none of the trio could solve.

That the man had some purpose in coming to the village was certain, for no man would be foolish enough to go in among his enemies, unless he had some object in view.

They could not hear the words that were uttered, but they saw the warriors as they started forward, and then saw them fall upon their knees around the mysterious rider and his white steed.

Who he was they could not guess, neither could they think of any reason that would make the Indians afraid of him.

The Red Wizard soon got up and went off, followed by the pale-face and his horse. The Indians gave way for them, and dared not go within five feet of the stranger, for fear they should accidentally touch him, and they remembered what the Manitou had said respecting their touching him.

They did not want to be killed by a thunderbolt, and hence they kept away from the White Wizard.

The latter by using his ventriloquist powers had completely subdued the magician, and the latter now feared him greatly.

The Comanches were afraid of their Wizard, for they had seen the inside of his hut, and they knew that it contained such things as skeletons, snakes, reptiles, and many other horrible things.

Therefore when a person appeared who could make the Red Wizard bow to him, it was not natural that they should fear him.

Barry Le Clare was shown to the large Medicine Lodge, and he entered, taking his horse with him.

The Red Wizard waited at the door of the cave in the hope of seeing the pale-face hold communication with the Manitou, but a keen glance from the sharp eyes of the latter scared him, and thinking that the latter might call down the curse of the Manitou upon him, he hurried off.

The Indians had resolved to show the White Wizard a fine sight that morning. This would be the burning of the three prisoners.

Soon after the pale-face had disappeared in the medicine tent, a loud howling arose in the village.

The French naturalist carried a little case with him, in which to put the rare thing that he found.

The Comanches had taken this, and a huge green umbrella made of the strongest silk, from monsieur when he was captured.

After the Wizard had gone, one Indian, more curious than his brethren, opened the case and began tasting what was in the little vials. Soon he began to feel a little sick, and a crowd gathered around. He got worse every ten seconds, and at length, swollen up terribly, he lay upon the ground, dead.

It was then that the howls echoed through the village.

Not one of the Indians would touch either the box or the umbrella after this. Even the magician was afraid of them, for he said that even the touch of a bottle was poison.

Barry came out to see what the noise was, and he increased his popularity with the Indians by tasting a dozen bottles.

He could read the names on them, which the Indians could not.

One of the Indians thought he could do the same, and signified as much. By a sleight of

hand Barry changed the bottles, and the man thought he had the same one the pale-face had just tasted.

It proved to be an emetic, and the fellow soon amused the rest of the Indians by his working face and heaving stomach.

The pale-face shut up the case and took it into the medicine-lodge, where he had left his horse.

Soon after, the three prisoners were brought out to be tried before the council, and to be doomed to the stake.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CIRCUS-RIDER MAGICIAN.

THE large council-lodge was filled with Comanche chiefs.

Red Buffalo being at the head of the tribe, and the most renowned Indian present, was given the post of honor.

The White Wizard was ushered into the lodge, dressed as a circus-rider, and given a seat near the head chief and medicine-man. Soon after the three captives were brought in, with their hands still bound behind them. Their eyes rested with wonder upon Barry, for they did not know what to make of him.

A sly wink which he managed to give them unperceived by the reds, told them that, whoever he was, Barry was a friend to them.

One of the chiefs, an old man, opened the council, and with a short, fiery speech, set the blood rushing through the veins of the Comanches like fire.

A tall, wiry fellow jumped up when the old chief had finished, and spoke for some time upon the cruelty of the whites and their evident desire to exterminate the Indians.

Several more followed, and then Red Buffalo arose from his seat, letting his blanket fall from his shoulders to the ground as he did so. This chief was well known upon the border, as had also been his father, Spotted Wolf, and the prisoner and chiefs leaned forward and listened to his words.

The speech of Red Buffalo was short, but being to the point, its pithiness made up for its briefness.

"Chiefs and warriors of the Comanches: the great Manitou has placed three pale-faces in our hands. Shall we torture them or let them go?"

"It is the will of the Great Spirit that the prisoners should be tortured by being burned at the stake. A singing-bird whispers it in the ear of Red Buffalo. The prairie-wind brings the word 'torture' with it. Shall the pale-faces go free when eight warriors fell beneath their arms? No; the Manitou wills that they should die, and the Great Medicine-man shall decide their fate. Three moons ago Red Buffalo had a father and brother. Where now is the chief Spotted Wolf and Snake-head? Both have gone to the happy hunting-grounds, sent on their long journey by the bullets of the pale-face trappers. Let the medicine-man speak."

The Red Wizard looked around the council-lodge with his terrible eyes until they fell upon the prisoners.

Here they rested, and a horrible grin came upon his face, as he slowly arose to his feet and spoke:

"My brothers have spoken well. The death of the pale-faces has been sealed. Muchanaigo had a dream last night. The Manitou spoke to him and said the pale-faces must die unless there came a man who could outride the Comanches. If such came, then all but the young man were to go free. But where is the man?"

"Where, chiefs and warriors, is the man that is to outride the 'children of the plains?' Let him be found."

The medicine-man liked to speak about his dreams, for the superstitious Indians believed them, and what is more, thought him all the greater on account of them. The cunning Wizard always liked to put in that he had spoken to the Manitou, and this made the Comanches respect him more.

He had taken a dislike to Chauncy, probably because one of the men slain by the young man was a grandson of his, and he left him out purposely when he mentioned that should a man come who could outride the "prairie kings," the prisoners would be saved. He had not the least idea in the world that the man spoken of would appear, or that when he did come, he could even equal the Comanches at riding. He was somewhat surprised, therefore, when Barry got up and said he was the man. The circus-rider made a very fine speech, telling about a dream he had had, and how the Manitou had chosen him to ride with the Comanches.

The medicine-man of a tribe of Indians is generally some sharp fellow, who knows a few tricks which, though plain enough to a white man, he easily manages to gull the red-men completely with.

The Red Wizard, on this occasion, was greatly surprised when Barry got up and spoke, offering to ride against the best Comanche in the village, and a smile came to his lips.

He was glad, now, that the white man had offered to ride.

Now he should have one triumph over his rival, for the latter would be sure to get beat.

There was no chance for him at all. The Comanches live on the backs of their horses; but it did not occur to the mind of the red-man that Barry Le Clare had been reared on a horse—had been a celebrated rider at the early age of fifteen.

The red-skin felt sure of a victory over his fellow-wizard.

He would show the Comanches that the latter was not unconquerable. So when Barry seated himself again, the Red Wizard arose, and said that the Manitou had spoken the truth, the man had made his appearance, and now the next thing for the Comanches to do, was to watch the trial of skill.

This was accepted with yells of applause by the Comanches.

They knew that they were reckoned the best riders of the plains, and they had no equals among the red-men.

What then had they to fear from a white man who had lived in the cities and towns all his life?

The council was broken up, and the whole population hurried over to the plain just beyond the village.

The three prisoners, guarded by several war-

riors, were brought along to witness the performance. The man selected by the Comanches to compete with the White Wizard was a medium-sized, athletic fellow, with long arms and supple joints.

He had a very fast and strong mustang, and it was a pretty large one, too. He was stripped, except a piece of cloth around his loins, and as he sprung upon his steed a shout arose from his admiring comrades. They had seen him ride before, and, as he was the champion of the village, they expected to see the pale-face beaten all to nothing. The horse was an iron-gray, and was quite celebrated on the plains on account of its speed.

The man that owned and rode it knew it well, and would have bet his bottom dollar (if he ever had one) that he would come out of a trial of skill or a race with the pale-face first best.

The three prisoners watched the white man, and they felt their courage rise when they saw the smile on his firm countenance.

The man knew his own powers.

Had he looked scared, the whites would have given up all hope, for they knew that if the Indian frightened him there would be no chance for him to win.

But the confident and "devil-may-care" look upon his face reassured them, and they had confidence in him.

The white looked to the girdle which was around his horse, and as the Indian had no bridle on his horse, Barry took his off.

The Indian was to show lead, now.

He was mounted on his horse, and at a signal from the head chief he dashed out upon the plain.

The mane of his horse was long, and had been plaited.

One of these plaits served to rest his arm in, and he performed all sorts of tricks, sliding around his horse and coming up on the other side, and picking up things from the ground.

At length he put on the bridle and went through the last thing on his programme. This consisted of standing up on the horse bare-back, holding on with the bridle and jumping up and down. The Comanche did all of these things with a great deal of skill, and when he rode into the crowd he was greeted by a chorus of savage yells. The Indians were delighted.

Of course the pale-face could do nothing like this.

Imagine their surprise and chagrin when they saw him dash out and go through the same thing as easily as the Indian had done, and with extremely aggravating *nonchalance*.

It was now his turn to lead.

The medicine-man was not beaten yet.

If his man could equal the White Wizard when the latter led, the prisoners would not be free after all. And even if the white man did beat his red rival, the Red Wizard did not intend to give them up. He was sharp enough for that. *He would have another dream.*

CHAPTER VII.

A TRIAL OF SPEED FOR SCALPS.

BARRY got a score of Indians, and soon a complete circus ring was made, all but the sawdust.

The lassoes were stretched around the ring, and then Barry walked his horse into the ring.

The bridle was still on him, and leaping upon his back the circus-rider sat down and rode around the ring several times.

The horse seemed delighted. For years he had been accustomed to performing in the ring, and now that he found himself in his old place again he was glad.

With a springy step he cantered around the ring, and the Indians could not help admiring the shape of both man and beast, and the beautiful appearance of the latter.

With a piece of chalk Barry whitened the bottoms of his pumps, and then leaped to his feet. A chirrup from his lips sent the white steed off at a rapid pace, and holding onto the bridle, Barry jumped up and down after the manner of a countryman who is supposed to be going to market.

The spirits of the Indians arose. Their man could do that.

The Indian came into the ring and Barry went out. The red-skin went through the same thing, and was greeted with shouts of approval by his dusky comrades.

The latter now began to think that the pale-face was no wizard at all, but just a good rider, so when Barry again entered the ring, seated on his horse, they greeted him with groans.

The rider smiled, however. He knew that in a few minutes the tune of the Indians would be wonderfully changed.

Again he rode around the ring, standing erect on his feet, and the Comanches began to think that this was all he could do, and they felt happy, accordingly.

They saw the rider lean over his horse and whisper a word in its ear. Then he rose up again and the white steed went around the ring like a flash. Suddenly the bridle dropped from the hand of the rider, and he stood up alone without any support.

Ah, here was something worth looking at.

The Comanches love to watch good riding, and would doubtless patronize a circus should one visit them.

Even though they knew that the rider was liberating the two prisoners, yet their admiration was unbounded.

Their eyes opened with surprise, and they were speechless when the rider went around the ring like lightning, with nothing to support him. He stood with his arms folded across his breast, and a smile of triumph upon his face.

But this was nothing. The best was yet to come.

At a word from his rider the white horse slackened his speed, and came to a regular gallop, such as the circus horses alone know how to bring out.

Then if the reader could have seen the eyes of the Comanches as they watched the rider, they would not have wondered that they took him to be a wizard.

Barry stood with his back to the horse's head, and suddenly sprung into the air, turning over and making a complete somerset. He touched the back of the horse, and again he went up. The Indians saw at once that their man could never do this, and yet the Comanche was pluck.

As Barry Le Clare rode out of the ring, he rode in and made the attempt. He succeeded very well in the first part, although he had to swing his arms pretty wildly to balance himself, but when he came to the jumping, he made a complete failure.

Instead of coming down upon the back of his horse, which acted well for the first time in the ring, he came plump upon the ground, and rolled over and over.

A shout of laughter arose from the dusky throng, and the discomfited Comanche arose to his feet in a savage manner.

Striding up to Barry he asked him if he wanted to race.

The latter replied that he didn't care if he did.

"Me make bet wid pale-face. Gray horse beat, me win, white 'un beat, pale-face win," said the Comanche.

"Show your money, old man. How much on it?" exclaimed Barry.

"Have no money, all gone."

"Then how're you going to bet?"

"Me bet scalp for scalp. Ef pale-face win, he take the scalp of the Red Bear. Ef Indian win, he scalp pale face," was the rejoinder, and by the look that Red Bear gave his rival, all knew that he would have no hesitation in scalping the victorious rider, should his horse win the race.

For a moment the rider looked at his horse, and then at the fleet mustang of his foe. The proposition so unexpected, staggered him a little at first, but he quickly replied:

"All right, Red Bear. Onto your horse. Do your best if you would not be beaten, though Heaven knows I wouldn't scalp you. But no Indian can ever cow Barry Le Clare."

Delighted at this chance to redeem his reputation, the Indian leaped upon the back of his horse, and then the preliminaries were arranged. A dozen men on horseback rode out to a spot about a mile from the village, and here a stake was put into the ground.

The dozen men stayed here to see that the race was conducted on a fair principle. The two racers were to start from a stake which had been driven into the ground near the village, and were to round the stake where the dozen warriors were waiting, and then come back to the first stake.

At a signal, the two started off, and for the first quarter of a mile both kept together. Then the Indian began to draw slowly but surely ahead. The Comanches felt some satisfaction when they saw that this was a fact, but they were not confident yet.

They knew a great deal about horses, and they saw that the white steed was as fast a runner as the gray one, if his rider chose to put him down to it.

They began to think, however, as the Indian still kept drawing ahead, that the white steed was not as good as they had taken it to be, and their spirits rose.

When the Indian rounded the half-way pole, and came onto the back stretch five lengths ahead of his rival, a yell broke from them.

They thought that perhaps after all the Indian might win, and that from the look of things it seemed very much as though the gray would win the race.

The Indian himself felt sure of it. He was certain that the white steed was doing its best, and that he could at least win by five lengths. And then he would have the pleasure of scalping the White Wizard.

He felt so sure of this that he yelled with joy.

Half the last half was done, and still he was five lengths ahead.

Suddenly a low whistle came from the lips of the pale-face.

It is a signal, and obeying it, the white steed quickly increased his speed. Like an arrow shot from the bow, the horse darted forward, gaining rapidly on the other.

The Indian began kicking and pounding his horse, yelling like a demon all the while, but it was no use.

The animal was running at its greatest speed, and nothing could increase it. The pale-face passed him before the last quarter was reached, and came up to the home-stake six lengths ahead.

A shout from the prisoners welcomed the victor.

The Indian came in looking terribly sullen, for he would not have cared could he only take the scalp of his enemy.

He would have been content to lose his own then.

Handing over his horse to a friend, he stepped up to Barry and stood before him with open breast.

"Strike," said he; "Red Bear has lost. His scalp is yours."

"Never!" exclaimed Barry, moving back. "Red Bear's scalp belongs to himself. Let him live and learn wisdom."

"The pale-face is afraid to strike. See, Red Bear is not afraid to die. He spits at the White Wizard with his last breath."

As the Indian spoke he drew his knife and stabbed himself to the heart.

Then with a loud yell he sunk back upon the ground, dead.

He had done well, for he could never have lived with the Comanches had he failed to make good his wager.

The relatives of the dead man took the body away to be buried after the fashion of the Comanches.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MANITOU MUST BE OBEYED.

THE circus-rider was not yet done. He wished to show what his horse could do in the way of tricks, and for half an hour he kept up the performance. The white steed was a celebrated trick horse, and could waltz in a manner truly surprising.

All who have been to the circus know the many tricks performed by a horse. All of these Barry showed off before the Comanches, and the Indians enjoyed it all very much.

At length he thought it was time to stop, and going over to where the prisoners were still standing, he cut the bonds of the two whom he had saved by his beating the Comanche selected to ride with him. The medicine-man did not like this, and he stepped forward to put a stop to it.

Before he could open his mouth, a voice, com-

ing as all the Indians thought from above them, cried out the words:

"Let Muchanaigo beware. He has dark thoughts in his brain. * Let him not attempt to carry them out. His hand will be useless if he attempts to lift it above the head of one of the prisoners. He gave his word, let him break it if he dares. It is the Great Manitou that speaks. He must be obeyed."

Instantly the Indian stopped still in his tracks. There was no disobeying this order.

He said not a word, but turning, sought his lodge, and did not make his appearance during the rest of the day.

He had found his match in the pale-face.

But for the superstition of the Indians, Barry could never have played the trick upon them.

The Indians lost no time in giving back to the prisoners everything that had been taken from them.

The little Frenchman danced for joy when he once more got his hands upon his case and umbrella.

He examined the former carefully to see that none of the vials were missing, but found to his great joy that it had only sustained a little injury while in the hands of the Indians.

All the time Monsieur Tierney kept up a rattling volley of words which were a mingled crowd of thanks for the aid of Barry, denunciations on the heads of the Indians, and exclamations of delight when he found some valuable specimen uninjured.

Indeed, the Indians had only got at the vials, and the fellow that had got at these would never do so again.

The Indians grinned to see the curious little fellow marching up and down with the umbrella fastened to his back and his case in his hand. He had a revolver in his belt, about five inches long, which might make a man sick if discharged down his throat.

The trapper had his revolvers, rifle, and knife and everything that belonged to him. One of the Comanches tried to keep his tobacco-pouch, but Ralph missed it, and Red Buffalo, fearing to bring down the vengeance of the Manitou upon the village, made the warrior give it up, much to his disgust, and to the great delight of the trapper, who immediately went to business and took a "chaw." Then the two mounted their horses and rode off, carrying with them all of their possessions.

The trapper had a piece of paper in his hand which had been slyly given him by Barry before they left the village.

The trapper did not intend to go far. He would not leave the son of his old friend to his fate.

He intended hiding somewhere until dark, and then seeing what could be done for Chauncy. Suddenly he remembered the paper he held in his hand. He tried to read the few lines that were written on it, but being no scholar and knowing only the capitals, he found it impossible.

What should he do?

Maybe the naturalist could read it; at any rate it would do no harm to ask him. No sooner thought of than acted upon. To the great delight of the guide the Frenchman declared that

he could read it, and took it from the former's hand.

It read as follows, being written in lead pencil:

"Ride to the bank of the river, about six miles from here, and hide until dark. Then I will join you with the young fellow. I will give the hoot of an owl, and you answer me with the cry of the loon."

"BARRY LE CLARE."

The Frenchman read this to the trapper, and then the latter could not help expressing his joy.

"Snakes an' catamounts," ejaculated he, "thet's good as far as it goes. That feller's sharp, an' he'll get Chauncy away if anybody could. Didn't his boss knock spots out o' the gray 'un?"

"Oui, monsieur, he be a very fine man. He make good hunter. He von magnificent rider, von elegant jumper, von splendid racer, von superb ventiloquist, von excellent—"

"That'll do, mounsheer. We'll make tracks for the river now. It's past noon, and I want ter git ter the river so that we can hev some dinner. What d'ye say ter that?" said the trapper, breaking in upon the Frenchman, who, after the manner of his nation, was getting excited, and was about to launch forth into a vivid and startling string of praise.

"Begar, I do feel hungry, monsieur. I could eat von dozen frog-legs now, vid relish. Oh, dey are superb," cried the naturalist.

"Bah! ye think o' nothin' but frogs. I wish I had a dozen ter give ye. For my part, I want a good hunk o' buffler or venison."

"Le 'Mericans have no taste. Dey know not vat is good. *Mon Dieu!* in la belle France de frog is de best esteemed meat. Here de boys throw stones at them, an', *sacre*, kill them just for fun. *Diable!* vat I come out here for?" exclaimed the little man.

"Ter find somethin' az would make yer fortune. So ye've told me many a time," said the guide.

"Just so. You are right, monsieur. Ven I find dat, den I be happy. Every von vill talk about Monsieur Tierney, de great naturalist. Oh, den I vill have my reward for all de trouble and expense. But what have we got to eat?"

"Nothin' az I knows on. The pesky reds didn't offer to give us a bite, but then we've got our firearms, an' an old hunter like me, what's got his shootin'-iron, deserves to starve if he can't knock over somethin' on the plains. If we war on the desert now it would be a different matter. We'll git somethin' when we reach the river."

The two owned very good horses. The guide owned his, while the Frenchman's had been borrowed from a friend in Austin.

The Comanches had come upon them the night before, and had captured them, though not without a vigorous resistance on the part of both of them. The hunter had killed three of the reds before he was captured, and the Frenchman managed to give his enemies several sound cracks with his huge umbrella before he was pulled down. He entirely forgot the revolver that he had thrust in his belt to make himself look fierce.

The little man was a curious body, but he

pluck, as the reader will see before the story comes to a close.

The river was at length reached, and the two camped.

While the naturalist was building a fire out of some light, dry wood, the guide went off to see if he could shoot something.

The river was pretty wide at this point, but it was shallow, and both sides were covered with trees and bushes.

The guide was not long in sighting a deer, and soon the crack of his revolver sounded its death-knell.

The two men were soon busy cooking venison steaks over the fire. They ate their dinner and then cooked the remainder of the deer over the fire. The guide knew that if Chauncy was rescued the whites would have to make tracks pretty lively, for the Indians would be terribly mad. They intended to torture the young man in every conceivable manner, for he had got the young Donna away from them. They did not know about the panther, and thought that had it not been for the young man, the Donna would never have got away the second time.

Darkness at length came upon the scene. At length the moon arose and lighted up the earth with her beautiful light.

Several hours passed away and then the tramping of horses came from the plain. Then the loud, mournful hoot of the owl echoed through the trees.

"It is them," cried the guide, and immediately the cry of the loon startled the Frenchman. It was the guide returning the signal.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WHITE WIZARD DRUGS THE GUARD.

CHAUNCY was thrust back into the Prison Lodge and two guards posted around it. The Comanches did not mean to let him escape if they could possibly help it.

There were altogether about ten men killed, and the Indians intended to let the whole of their vengeance fall upon Chauncy.

The young hunter walked up and down in his lodge, thinking of the Donna Iola. Sleeping or waking the Donna was uppermost in his thoughts. What a pity it was that after coming together in such a curious way they should be separated.

Where could she be now?

Chauncy knew from the expressive look the lovely Donna had given him, as in obedience to his command she rode away and left him, that he was the first object of her affection.

He could not help feeling highly elated as he thought of this, and he quite forgot for a time that he was a prisoner.

When he did remember this he also remembered the fact that while the three prisoners were watching the riding of Barry Le Clare, the guide had whispered in his ear that if he and the Frenchman did get off they would do their best to rescue the young man.

He had often heard his father tell tales about the guide, and he knew that when Ralph said he would do a thing he would go through fire and water to accomplish it.

The afternoon passed slowly away and at

length the shades of night began to cover the face of the earth.

The moon being on the decline would not rise until very late, and there would be several hours of darkness before the earth would be lighted up with her bright rays.

Whatever was to be done must be done during this period of darkness. Barry had retired soon after sunset.

An hour passed and then another and another.

The village was quiet, no unusual noise breaking the silence of the night, but the occasional barking of some dog or the neighing of a horse. The Comanches were fast asleep and the two guards who walked around the Prison Lodge were beginning to feel drowsy themselves.

They would have to keep watch until midnight, or about an hour after moonrise, and then they would be relieved.

They were both walking together and talking, when one of them caught sight of a form approaching them; it did not come in a sneaking way but walked boldly toward them.

They soon distinguished the form of the White Wizard.

What could he want at this time of night?

The pale-face was soon up to them, and greatly to their surprise he stopped beside them and spoke:

"My red brothers seem to be on guard," said he.

"The Wizard speaks with a straight tongue," replied one of the Indians.

"What is in the lodge they guard?"

"The pale-face captive. Red Buffalo thinks that he will escape, so he put Red Pine and Snapping Fox on guard."

"The pale-face can not escape when Red Pine and the Snapping Fox are on guard. He is as safe as if he was tied to the stake and the fagots piled up around him," said Barry.

This flattery greatly pleased the Indians.

"The Wizard is a great man. He knows everything. He is a great rider, and would make a big Comanche brave," said one.

"Is not the warrior thirsty? Would he like a little fire-water to make him glad?" asked the cunning circus-rider.

The eyes of the two Comanches snapped at the very thought.

"Pale-face great man; he gib Injun drink."

"Yes; here, take a good sup apiece. There's plenty more where that came from," said Barry, taking out his bottle.

It was a medium-sized black one, and was two-thirds full of brandy.

The circus-rider, just after dark, had gone out to the clump of trees in which he had hidden his clothes, and had got the bottle of brandy from them. It was not pure brandy, however.

He had taken a little vial from his coat-pocket and poured a little of the contents into the black bottle.

It was a subtle drug, which would produce a feeling which for drowsiness could not be equaled.

Barry intended to get the upper hand of the Comanche guards, and he knew that to do so he would have to drug the fire-water.

The nearest Indian grasped the bottle. He

threw back his head, with the neck of the bottle in his mouth. The bottle was upturned, the Indian's eyes sought the heavens, and a gurgling sound told both of the others that the brandy was finding its level.

The other Comanche, Snapping Fox, seemed to think that if Red Pine waited until his eyes found the star they seemed to be in search of, the brandy would be all gone.

Accordingly, he seized hold of the bottle, and was soon in deep contemplation of the blue dome of heaven (apparently).

Any one, to see these two Indians examining the sky so steadily, would have felt sure that they were greatly interested in astronomy, and yet the two did not notice the stars while looking upward.

Their thoughts were all upon the liquor, and when the bottle was handed back to the owner, it was empty.

Barry was sharp, and he immediately said:

"I just brought this for a sample. If Red Pine and Snapping Fox do what I want them to-morrow, they shall have a dozen bottles of this fine fire-water."

He said this for a certain reason.

The Indians might rightly suspect his motive for bringing them fire-water when they began to feel the effect of it, if he went right away. Now, by his words, he made them believe that he wanted a job done on the morrow, and that if they did it, he would give them a dozen bottles like the sample he had brought to tempt them.

"We do what Wizard say," said Red Pine.

A moment after, Barry moved away. He did not go far, however, for he wanted to go to work as soon as the drug put the two Indians asleep. He remained within ear-shot, and listened.

The Indians kept talking rapidly about five minutes, and then their voices became thick and the words few and far between.

Soon Barry knew that both were fast asleep, and he walked cautiously forward. The two guards were lying close together near the door of the lodge, tightly locked in the arms of Morpheus.

It was not likely that they would awaken very soon.

Barry stepped over them, and, unbarring the door softly, he opened it.

All was dark within, and he could distinguish nothing.

"Young fellow, where are you?" he said, in a loud whisper.

It was well he spoke, for Chauncy had managed to unloose his bonds, and having found a sort of club in a corner of the lodge, he had raised it and was ready to strike when Barry spoke.

"Who are you?" he asked, for he could barely see the other.

"Barry Le Clare. I saved the others, and have come after you. Hurry out here," said the circus-rider.

Chauncy came out, and the door was shut and barred again.

"Come, let us hurry away from here," said he.

"Hold on, you want weapons. I noticed that

Red Pine had a fine rifle, and a revolver. Get them from him," said Barry.

Chauncy picked up the rifle, and found to his delight that it was his own, as were also all the other things the Indian carried.

He quickly transferred them to his own person, and then announced himself ready. Barry led him to the Medicine Lodge in which he had taken up his quarters, and where his horse now was, and then left him. He soon came back, leading one of the best horses that was in the corral. He was an excellent judge of horse-flesh, and he knew what kind of a steed to pick out.

There were several saddles and bridles in the Medicine Lodge, which had doubtless been taken from hunters and emigrants.

Taking his pick of these, Chauncy put them on his steed, and then the two went through the village, making as little noise as possible and leading their horses behind them.

When they got to the clump of trees, the circus-rider changed his clothes, and with his weapons in his belt and hand, and the bundle on his horse, he led the way toward the river.

He knew from the direction the two whites had taken when they left the village where they would strike the river, and he headed for that point. The moon soon came out, and where the two came up to the tree on the bank of the river the circus-rider gave a loud, solemn hoot.

It was answered by the cry of the loon, and soon two horsemen came toward them.

CHAPTER X.

A WILD RACE FOR LIFE.

THE trapper was right in thinking that the Comanche would pursue the four whites they found out their escape.

Early in the morning, the chief, Red Buffalo, emerged from his lodge and went toward that one which had been used as a Prison Lodge for the young hunter.

He was greatly surprised to find both of the guards lying upon the ground. At first the chief thought that they were dead; had been killed by some enemy, in order that the prisoner might be rescued. He quickly discovered his mistake, however, and wondered what could be the matter with the two men, for he had great trouble in arousing them from their stupor.

Red Pine told the chief how the White Wizard had visited them and had given them a drink of fire-water. The chief knew that there was something wrong when he heard this, and he quickly undid the bars that fastened the door.

No sooner had he disappeared from the sight of the two warriors than a loud yell announced to them that the lodge was empty. The chief rushed out, gave a few orders to the two warriors, and then began hunting around for the trail.

He found this, and had followed it outside the village, when he was joined by twenty-five men, among whom were the two guards whom Barry Le Clare had drugged the night before.

They were all mounted and armed, and Red Pine led a horse for the chief. The latter had left orders that a second detachment should follow them after several hours.

As the chief sprung upon his horse, Red Pine communicated to him the suspicious fact that the White Wizard was not in his tent, nor had he been seen that morning by any person. All now knew who it was that had liberated the prisoner, and there would be no escape for the white circus-rider, should the Comanches once get a crack at him.

The chief called out a name, and the warrior who was thus designated, stepped out with a smile of conscious triumph.

He was the best trailer in the Comanche village, and had been aptly named the Starved Wolf, for that beast will keep on the trail of its prey for days. It is not by its speed that the wolf tires out its prey, but by its pertinacity in keeping to the trail.

Starved Wolf rode up to where the chief was, and throwing himself from his horse he bent down and examined the trail.

The keen-eyed Indian saw marks that he could distinguish anywhere, and with a yell he sprung upon his horse again.

He had noted the general direction in which the trail ran, and it would be easier for him to follow it now.

Barry and the young hunter had not been skilled enough in woodcraft to make a *detour*, as any old trapper would have done.

Bending over his horse's neck, the Starved Wolf gave the animal a kick that sent him forward, and then the trailing began.

To the Comanche trailer the marks upon the ground were plain enough, while to an amateur they would have been nearly invisible.

The Indians went forward at a rapid pace, and they were not long in reaching the trees which grew on the bank of the river.

The whites had crossed here and the Indians lost nearly half an hour in finding it again on the other shore.

The four whites had gone up-stream and emerged from the water in a rocky place. Had all of them been old hunters, such care would have been taken to keep from leaving a trail that the Comanches, sharp though they were, would never have found it; but only one was a hunter, and the others, despite their caution, could not help leaving some marks, which the Indians at length came upon. Red Buffalo began to despair of ever catching up to the pale-faces, for they had at least six hours the start of him and his warriors. He did not know that something had happened which, though unlucky to the four men, was favorable to him.

Barry and the young hunter were soon joined, after the former had given the signal and it had been answered, by two figures on horseback, which they were not long in making out as the old hunter and the little French naturalist, Monsieur Tierney.

The hunter shook the young man's hand and also that of the circus-rider. The latter then told how it was he had got the prisoner away, and both of the others laughed heartily.

The guide said he would like to see Red Buffalo when the chief found out the escape of the prisoner.

The guide cherished a deep hatred for the chief of the Comanches, and should the two ever come face to face in a fight, one or the other was

bound to go under if nothing occurred to separate them. Twice before this had the guide been a captive in the hands of Red Buffalo, and both times had he escaped. Once he had run the gantlet, and pretty well bruised and cut, was about to be burned at the stake, when old Captain Wilton and his company of regulars rescued him. Ralph was an army scout at that time.

The second time he had escaped by his own exertions.

The four whites rode for nearly two hours and then they were suddenly stopped by the old guide.

He saw a suspicious object coming toward them from the northeast. The guide made all of them dismount, and then told them that the objects they had taken to be buffaloes were Indians.

The latter were about forty in number, and to the astonishment and chagrin of the four whites, they camped close by them and began to cook an early breakfast.

The whites muffled the heads of their horses in their blankets so that the animals might not betray them by a whinny or a neigh. The whites and their steeds crouched in the grass for several hours. It was just at daybreak that the Apaches, for such the guide declared the Indians to be, departed, much to the relief of the whites.

No sooner were they well out of sight than the four resumed their journey. The sun soon arose and lit up the earth with his bright, warm and cheerful rays.

The Frenchman could not resist stopping now and then to pick some curious flower which he saw in the green oases.

The sun was several hours high when they reached a grove of trees and entered in among them. A cool spring bubbled up in a shady spot, and the horses and their riders took long draughts of the excellent water. The horses were suffered to move around for awhile so that they might have some breakfast and also get rested.

The four were talking earnestly, when the guide suddenly put up his hand and motioned to the others to remain quiet.

Instantly all was silent, and with open ears the four listened for a repetition of the sound that had alarmed the guide.

Soon all heard it. It sounded like the trampling of a drove of buffaloes or wild horses, and came from the same direction that the four men had come from.

Three of the whites thought that the noise was made by buffaloes or wild horses, but the old guide knew better.

He thought it was made by Comanches, who were following up their trail, and springing to his feet he rushed to the edge of the trees. A single glance served to show him that his suspicion was not false. Over a score of Comanches were coming straight toward the grove.

At their head rode two men whom the guide knew.

One was the chief, Red Buffalo, the other, a famous trailer. The Starved Wolf was leaning over, and Ralph knew that his eyes were fixed upon the trail.

Ralph saw that there was going to be a fight, and he resolved to be the aggressive party. A

word to his comrades sufficed to tell them of his desires, and a few seconds after three rifles cracked and three bullets winged with death sped through the air.

The guide had not aimed at Red Buffalo, for he wanted to kill that worthy in a square stand-up fight.

Three of the Comanche warriors fell over, and the rest were somewhat surprised for a moment.

Recovering quickly, they gave a loud war-cry and came forward with a rush. They entered among the trees, but no enemy was in sight. On they went, and at length emerged on the open plain on the other side of the grove.

A howl of joy broke from the lips of Red Buffalo, for there, not far in front of them, and flying before them, were the four whites.

It was now a race for life. Which will be the winner?

CHAPTER XI.

MUZZLE TO MUZZLE, AND WHO WILL WIN?

It was now a very exciting, and yet, on the plains, a common scene, that the sun looked down upon.

First came the four whites, the circus-rider going along as easy and as graceful as if he was trotting around in the ring for the amusement of the spectators. The three others were urging their steeds on with heel and voice, but the wiry little animals were doing their utmost, and could not go any faster than they were going.

The little Frenchman looked very curious, as he bounced up and down on his horse, his umbrella held over the pommel just as the others held their rifles. Not being accustomed to horses, this wild ride came pretty hard on him, and he kept muttering to himself that if he was so happy as to see La Belle France once more, he would never leave her friendly shores.

After the whites came the score of Comanches, racing along in wild confusion, and now and then breaking into a loud yell, which was given partly to urge their horses onward, and partly to weaken the nerves of the fugitives.

In this latter, however, they were mistaken. Even the little foreigner showed commendable pluck, and several times he put his hand upon his little revolver, as if to try a shot at the Comanches, but was restrained by Ralph, who told him to save his powder.

The circus-rider could easily have distanced both his comrades and the Comanches, had he been so cowardly as to have wished to do so. This was far from being the state of Barry Le Clare's feelings.

He was no coward, as his entering the hostile village to save persons who were entire strangers to him proved.

The three mustangs were keeping their distance very well, but the guide knew that soon they would begin to fall off, and he resolved to diminish the number of the Comanches as much as possible before the latter began to gain upon the four whites.

Turning in his saddle, he lifted his rifle to his shoulder.

Monsieur Tierney had seen Ralph discharge his gun while in among the trees, and as he had

not seen him load it while he rode, he felt sure that the guide was only trying to scare the Indians.

He could not help smiling at the simple ruse, as he deemed the movement of the hunter; but the smile on his face quickly changed to a look of astonishment which was truly ridiculous.

What surprised him was the fact that when the guide pulled the trigger of his rifle, there came a sharp, whip-like crack, that sounded high and clear above the yells of the Comanches and the noise made by the hoofs of the horses.

And what was still more wonderful, one of the pursuing braves seemed to have run against a bullet, for with a shrill shriek of mortal anguish, he threw his arms wildly into the air and fell from his horse to the ground, to rise no more.

Ralph's bullet had done its work, and done it well, too.

The Comanche would never scalp another enemy; he would never drive his tomahawk into the head of a helpless woman or child again. His fighting days were over.

The little Frenchman wondered greatly how the old hunter could shoot with such deadly effect from the back of a horse that was going at its utmost speed. Afterward, Monsieur Tierney tried the thing himself, but found it a hard job to turn and discharge a gun while going at full speed, and as to taking any aim at all, why the thing was simply impossible with him.

It is really a very difficult and yet useful thing to learn, this shooting so accurately from the back of a horse.

The Indians only yelled a little harder, and urged their horses on a little faster, if that were possible, on having their number diminished by the rifle of the guide.

A good many of them carried guns; in fact, when Red Buffalo picked out this band, he singled out men who, for the most part, owned guns.

Some of these now began to fire, but being poor marksmen, their bullets whistled through the air many feet away from the heads of those they shot at.

A mile had been passed over since Ralph had fired his gun.

Again he turned in his saddle, with his rifle to his shoulder, and again the deadly crack sounded.

The Indians had seen him loading, and were expecting this.

Therefore, when the guide turned around, every one of them disappeared behind the body of his steed.

The crack of the hunter's rifle sounded *after* they had disappeared.

Had he fired too late to hit one of the Indians?

His bullet did not touch a red-skin, and yet it did what Ralph had intended it should. The three other whites turned in *their* saddles as Ralph fired, and when they saw that none of the Comanches were in view they felt sure that his bullet must have been wasted.

But it was not.

Ralph, when he turned to fire, had intended to shoot one of the Comanches, but when he saw them disappear from his sight, he quickly

changed his aim, and pointed his rifle at one of the horses.

His finger pressed the trigger, and following the crack came a shrill neigh of agony, and one of the horses dropped suddenly to the earth.

His rider, not expecting this, was not ready to leap off, and he came down with a terrible crack upon the ground.

He did not rise to his feet, for the simple reason that the fall had disjointed his neck, and he was a doomed man.

And now the Indians began gaining upon the four whites.

Foot after foot and yard after yard they came up, and at length Ralph saw that a stand must be made.

He had loaded the rifles of both his comrades who carried them, and in a few disjointed sentences he told them of his plan.

It was an old one, but was the only thing our friends could do, as there was not a tree in sight.

Waiting until they got to a place where, on account of the buffaloes, the prairie-grass for several acres around was very short, the four men suddenly jerked up their horses.

The guide quickly threw himself from the back of his horse on the side opposite to the Indians, and with his rifle in his hands, looked over the back of his animal at the foe.

The three others followed his example, and the Comanches divided and went on both sides of them. Not an Indian was in sight, they having disappeared behind their horses.

At a word from Ralph the four horses were put into a form like a square, and then the whites waited for the attack.

The Indians were not ready to fire when they rode past our friends. Had their rifles been loaded, they would most assuredly have given them a volley, aiming from beneath the necks of their horses. As it was, they rode off a good distance, and then coming together in a group, they sat upright on their horses.

They commenced talking and gesticulating wildly, and Ralph, as he looked at them, gave a chuckle of delight.

"I believe my ole Betsy Jane kin throw a chunk of lead over to them fellers. Anyhow, I'm goin' ter try it. Jest watch, now," said he.

His rifle was resting on the back of his mustang, and as he spoke, he took a careful aim along the gleaming barrel.

A puff of white smoke, a sharp crack, and the bullet went like lightning through the air. Ralph had calculated upon the distance and had aimed rather high. His calculation was correct, for one of the Comanches received the fatal bullet in his breast, and so unexpected was it, that he rolled from his horse without the usual death-yell.

A few seconds after and a loud yell from the Indians told that at length they had decided upon a plan of action.

They tried the old plan of circling around the four whites with their bodies hidden behind their horses, and gradually edging up closer and closer.

When near enough they began to discharge their guns, and then the guide thought it was time to retaliate.

Barry shot a horse with his rifle, and Ralph picked off the rider before he could hide in the short grass.

The young hunter shot another horse with a ball from a revolver, and his rifle sounded the death-note of the beast's owner and rider.

This was more than the Indians could stand.

This plan of having their men killed and none of their enemies injured, was too fine a thing in favor of the whites.

Luck so far seemed on the side of the whites, and the thing was getting monotonous to the Comanches.

Something must be done, and that at once.

CHAPTER XII.

CHASED BY THE FLAMES.

A LOUD, clear, singular yell sounded over the plain.

It was given by Red Buffalo himself, and the hunter knew just what it meant. The Indians were about to attack them in force.

"Down wid yer guns, boys, and let the pistols speak. They're a-comin' now, an' we'll give 'em the very ole dickens," said the old trapper.

On came the Comanches from every direction, to the number of eighteen. When they got close up, they rose to their seats, and brandished their tomahawks and rifles in the air.

As they did so, three revolvers sent as many of them to the ground, and the tiny crack of the Frenchman's revolver sounded quickly after. Monsieur Tierney had been an officer in the French army, and he was a dead shot with the pistol.

His man fell to the ground with a yell of pain, badly wounded.

Again the revolvers cracked, and yet a third time.

Eight of the Comanches were down, and the remaining ten, including Red Buffalo and Snapping Fox, were wavering.

Another discharge, and the fall of two more braves quickly decided them. Turning their mustangs, they bent forward, so that the whites could not get a good aim at them, and off they went like the wind.

"Go it, ole Red Buffler. I let ye go off this time, fur I want ter hev a stand-up fight wid ye. Yer maxim must be, 'those who fight an' run away, may live to fight another day,' judgin' by the way ye're a-makin' tracks," said the guide, with a grin.

The four whites mounted their horses, and rode off toward the south.

They reloaded all of their weapons, and were talking over the recent fight as they rode on.

Suddenly the others saw Ralph turn in his saddle, and a low exclamation burst from his lips. What had caused it?

The others turned and looked back, but could see nothing.

"What is it, Ralph?" asked the young hunter.

"Look at the horizon. See that," said Ralph.

"I see nothing but a cloud rising. What do you make it out to be?"

"I'll tell yer what I know it to be. It is smoke. The cussed Injins hev fired the grass. The wind is a-blowin' strong right toward us, an' we must git. It looks bad, fur our horses are tired."

The others started when they heard this. They were not through with the Comanches, after all. Red Buffalo hated them terribly, and although beaten in a square fight, he was not not beaten altogether.

Obeysing the order of the guide, the whites set off at as rapid a pace as they could command. This was not much, as their horses, or at least three of them, were pretty well tired out.

The Indians knew this when they fired the prairie-grass, and now the Indian chief thought he had the hated whites in a fix.

Little did he know the fertile brain of the old hunter.

Ralph explained to the other three, that some distance ahead was a wide but shallow stream. The prairie went down to the edge, and the fire would go that far and no further.

There was a forest on the other side, and Ralph wanted to reach this.

On they went, casting glances of apprehension behind them.

As the cloud of smoke and the fire came closer, these glances were partly admiring ones. No one but a timid man or an absolute coward could fail to admire the scene, even at this dangerous situation.

"Von beautiful sight. Von superb spectacle. Von grand, sublime, magnificent picture. De man dat paint dat, he be worth a fortune," murmured the brave and enthusiastic Frenchman, as he watched the huge billows of fire, as they rolled upward, topped off with volumes of dense black smoke.

Now a herd of fleet deer would shoot past the four riders, their large eyes distended with terror, at the sight behind them.

Then came a drove of wild mustangs, going like the wind. After this came a confused medley of buffaloes, wolves, coyotes, horses, deer, and in among them came a huge bear, which was making excellent time.

The fire looked grand and terrible, as it got closer and closer.

The four whites could not help admiring the sight, even though they knew that perhaps it would be their death.

The flames shot hundreds of feet into the air, and came onward at a speed which would have put a race-horse down.

The wind was pretty strong, and as the guide had said before, was coming straight toward them.

On went the four riders, and on came the sea of fire.

It looked like a fiery avenger, upon the track of the whites, and the little Frenchman could not help wondering whether he and his comrades would ever see the sun again.

That bright luminary was hidden from sight now, by the dense clouds of smoke that covered the prairie.

The guide began to look anxious. The river was quite a distance away, and the fire getting alarmingly near, as the increasing heat testified. At length the circus-rider exclaimed:

"How far is it to the water, Ralph?"

"About two-thirds o' a mile, I reckon," replied the hunter.

"We'll never reach it, then," said Barry.

"Jest what I was a-thinkin'," said the guide.

"Then what in Heaven's name will we do? We can't keep on this way. Have you no plan, Ralph?" said Barry.

"We'll stop not over three hundred yards from hyar," answered Ralph.

"How's that? There's not a tree, log or rock around. Explain what you say," said the young hunter, turning to the guide.

"Why, we can't reach the river, that's certain. We've got to do something, fur thar's no fun in being burned up by the pesky fire. Now, what I propose, is this: We'll *fight fire wid fire*. What d'ye say to that, now?" called out Ralph, to make himself heard above the trampling hoofs and the roaring and crackling of flames, which came rushing on like a huge wall.

"We don't know what you mean," returned Barry, in an equally loud tone, for the very same reason.

"Why, it's this: when we git to that high grass over thar, we'll dismount, and start a fire o' our own. How's that fur high?"

"It is von elegant plan vich ve shall follow at once, Monsieur Ralph," said the polite little naturalist.

Looking around as the Frenchman spoke (the naturalist was a little behind the others) the hunter saw a sight which caused a huge grin to come upon his face, and it to relax from its thoughtful mood.

The sharp and cool Frenchman had opened his umbrella, and was holding it above his head to keep the sparks off.

The guide gave a roar of laughter, in which he was joined by the other two, and which was echoed by the subject.

Then, as they reached the spot where the grass was high, the four men suddenly checked their wild career and sprung to the ground.

The Frenchman had shut down his umbrella, and being in the mind of the hunter the person most suited to hold the horses, the latter were given in his care. The other three began to pull up the dry grass, and to pile it up as rapidly as they could.

It was a matter of life and death with them, and the way they worked was a caution. Their arms flew about as if by magic, and the heap of grass grew higher and higher.

The Frenchman had his hands full in keeping the bridles of his horses in his grasp, for the animals, frightened at the nearness of the immense sea of fire, and at the falling sparks, were very wild and strove to break away, but the naturalist was stronger than one would take him to be, and he managed to hold onto them, although several times he was very nearly dragged from his feet.

It was a singularly wild and picturesque scene. The smoke obscured the light of the sun, and the flames lit up the prairie with a reddish sort of light, which made all objects have a curious look about them. There, pictured in the light, was a little man, holding four horses by the bridles, and striving to keep them quiet.

Close beside him were three others, plucking up the grass and pitching it upon the already large pile.

No wonder they did not stop an instant to note the near approach of the fire. *They were working for life, and had not a second to lose.*

It was getting fearfully hot, and they could stand it no longer.

Ralph took out his revolver and fired a load into the dry grass. Then, as a tiny flame sprung up, he grasped his horse and waited.

The others relieved Tierney of their horses, for which the little naturalist was not in the least sorry. The small flame grew larger and larger, and as the wind came down upon it, began moving, at first slowly, and then faster as it increased in size and strength.

CHAPTER XIII.

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE.

ANXIOUSLY the four men watched the fire they had kindled, and as it grew larger and stronger, and rushed onward more rapidly, a loud cheer came from their lips, for they saw that they were saved.

All they had to do now was to mount their horses and ride in the wake of the second fire. When the one behind them got to the spot where the second had been started, it would have to die out for want of fuel, which to it was the same as breath to a human being.

The old hunter had literally *fought fire with fire*, and the experiment had proved a complete success.

It was getting terribly warm now, and the four decided to change their position. Mounting their horses, they rode after the fire which had been started by them. After going some distance, they were forced to stop, as the ground was nearly red hot, such was the heat of the fire that had just swept over it. The fire behind them was only a few moments in reaching the black spot which told where Ralph had kindled the rival flame. It quickly died away, and our friends turned their attention to the other fire, which, in sailor's parlance, was bowling away over the prairie at a rapid rate.

The river was soon reached, and then the second fire also went out. Had the river been narrow, it would probably have leaped across the stream, and continued to ravage both forest and prairie.

The whites camped on the spot, for the ground was too hot for them to ride or walk over it. There was no wood around with which to build a fire. Everything that would burn had been swallowed up by the fierce flames, and the prairie was now black and had a very desolate look about it.

There was no need of the whites' building a fire, even had there been plenty of wood around. Here and there, where the grass had been of an unusual length, were heaps of red-hot cinders, if such we may call the remains of the prairie-grass.

All they had to do was to cook their meat by one of these ready-made ovens, and then proceed to munch it.

They cleared a round space of the burnt grass, and lay down upon the bare ground with only blankets around them.

The trapper and circus-rider smoked their pipes, and the whole four talked together in low tones.

Then, feeling kind of tired, they lay over and

slept, each one taking his turn as sentinel. The horses were hopped, but there was no danger of their trying to get away, or of their straying, for there was no sweet grass to lure them on. Poor animals! they had to go supperless that night, but Ralph had resolved that they should pay up for it the next morning, for they should stay in among the trees on the other side of the river for a day or two, reds or no reds.

Morning broke at last, and as the gray light in the east began to herald its approach, the four whites mounted their steeds.

They found that during the night a cool wind had sprung up, and the baked ground had lost most of its heat; in fact, it was no hotter than it generally was in the middle of the day.

Away they started, heading directly for the river. The horses seemed to scent grass and water, for they exerted themselves to get forward a great deal more than they would have voluntarily done had their heads been turned in the opposite direction. The forest on the river-bank was in plain view, and the four were rapidly approaching it.

The fire had burned down to the very edge of the water, and the contrast between the two shores was very striking; the one so bleak, black, and uninviting; the other so green and beautiful.

Upon reaching the water, the horses rushed in and began to drink heartily. Their riders were not long in following the example set by the horses, and they drank their fill too.

The stream was a branch of the Pecos, which the four whites had crossed just a few miles from the Comanche village.

They waded as far across as it was possible, and the horses gallantly swam the remaining distance with their riders upon their backs.

Upon reaching the other bank the four made haste to take the saddles from their horses, and after hopping the animals, they were left alone to eat the rich grass which was plentiful underneath the trees, and which was not dry and withered like that on the prairie, for the simple reason that the sun did not get at it so much.

A fire was quickly started, and soon Ralph heard the crack of the young hunter's rifle a short distance away.

The latter soon came into sight with his rifle slung across his back, and dragging the carcass of a young buck he had shot.

Ralph carved out a dozen fine steaks, and as the fire was progressing finely and without hardly any smoke, the four were soon busily engaged in cooking their steaks over the flames.

When the meat was done to a turn, they proceeded to make it disappear, and as only four steaks out of the twelve were left, when all were done, we might safely say that the appetites of the whites had not suffered any on account of the terrible death from which they had escaped the evening before.

The horses seemed to be enjoying themselves hugely, if one might judge by the way they "went for" the sweet grass.

They needed a good rest, and all four of the men decided to remain in the grove the whole of that day, and to start off the next morning. And even had the others wanted to go that day, Monsieur Tierney would have re-

fused point blank to move until the next morning.

He wanted to take a look around the woods, and would not forego that exquisite pleasure (to him at least), for any Comanches.

So immediately after he had finished his breakfast, he started off with his case in his hand, his umbrella fastened to his back, and his tiny revolver in his belt.

He promised to come back before dark, and to be sure that if he did get lost he could follow up his own tracks, or failing to do this, the others could track him, he stepped heavily and left a plain trail behind him, which any Indian boy able to walk could follow. The others remained near the fire, for they had no curiosity to examine the woods as the French naturalist had.

The trapper told the others that this was a good time to clean their firearms, and the whole three set about it.

The rifles and revolvers were cleaned and oiled well, and new loads put in, in the place of those that had been drawn.

Whenever Ralph, or for that matter either of the others, thought of the coolness of the naturalist, the evening before, in making use of his umbrella even when death seemed to stare him in the face, they could not help laughing.

They all admired the pluck of the Frenchman, and concluded that the umbrella, which they had always looked upon with disdain, was not such a bad thing to carry after all.

Little did the three men think that before the sun had set again, they would witness the little naturalist display a degree of nerve and cunning that would have shamed them all.

Little did they think, that the humble umbrella was to be put to a use which for adaptability and a ludicrous sight had never been equaled before. All unconscious of what they were to see, and of the amount of fun in store for them, the three men whiled away the morning as well as they possibly could.

The young hunter explained more fully to his comrades, how he had come to be captured by the Comanches.

The two others applauded him when he told how he had saved the Donna Iola from the panther, and afterward from the Indians.

"Jest like a romance, fur all the world. But ye say that the Donna Iola war from the South. I knew a little gal down thar named Iola Montgomery. Her daddy's an American, an' her mother's dead. That's a singular name, an' I don't doubt but what your Donna an' mine are the same. If they are, then ye may be sure thet Don Carlos, az the American is called by the Mexicans, will follow up the trail with his peons and vaqueros.

"Ye say the Donna told ye that Red Buffalo took a roundabout way to the village to bamboozle the pursuers, if there war any. Now I bet we're on the very trail they made, an' if so, we can look for the Don an' his men at any time, fur if the Donna does meet 'em she'll hurry 'em up, ye bet," said the hunter guide.

About two hours after noon, as the three men were sitting near the fire, Ralph put up his hand and told the others to listen.

They did so, and heard five little cracks which sounded strangely like the discharge of the naturalist's revolver.

"The mounseer's in trouble. Come, let's go an' help him," said Ralph.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BRILLIANT EXPLOIT WITH AN UMBRELLA.

WE will now follow the naturalist, and see what had befallen him.

When he left his comrades, he wandered around in every direction, his keen little eyes peering into every corner.

Now and then he would spring forward and gently pull up a modest-looking weed (to all appearance), and examine it eagerly.

Suddenly a scream of delight broke from his lips, and he leaped over at least eight feet of ground, and knelt beside a new kind of herb. With trembling fingers he examined it, giving vent to various exclamations of surprise and joy at the discovery.

"*Sacre*, I have found de plant at last. I am von famous man, an' de society will make me dere president, vid a salary of thousands of francs. Oh, Monsieur Tierney is von big man. I have found vat I comes to Ameriky to hunt for, an' I is satisfied. Begar, vat vill dat rival of mine, Bedoubsky, say? He vill be von very mad man ven he sees me president. *Mon Dieu*, I am von happy man," cried the Frenchman, as he tenderly pulled up the modest, but in after years, famous herb, by the roots, and put it into his case.

Long and earnestly did he look at it, as it lay in the receptacle which had been long waiting to receive its almost priceless form.

Noon had long since passed, and the Frenchman, too happy to think of such vile things as food, had not touched the meat that he had put in his pocket before leaving the camp.

His thoughts were running into the future, and he was building all sorts of castles in the air in respect to his fine prospects.

These were suddenly tumbled to the ground by a low growl, which sounded close beside him.

Instantly the naturalist turned, and saw, to his great surprise, a huge black bear coming directly toward him.

He had the presence of mind to slam the lid of the case, and as it had a spring-lock, it was fastened securely.

Springing to his feet, the little naturalist looked around for a tree which he could climb and remain in, until old Bruin should choose to depart.

The bear did not seem to be very hungry, and the Frenchman might not have to wait very long for it to go away, after all. The only tree anywhere near him was the one at the foot of which he had found the strange herb, and under which he was now standing. He resolved to climb up among the branches, and to remain there until the bear was gone.

No sooner thought of than acted upon.

Seizing a branch, the lowest on the tree, he pulled himself, umbrella and all, up among the limbs.

The tree was a very singular-looking one. One side was entirely destitute of branches, except at the top. Here a pretty large limb shot

straight out, and as this was bare and half-dead, it looked like an arm. The limb was very nearly eighty feet from the ground. The other side of the tree had limbs, large and small in abundance, *up to the dead limb*. Above this the tree was rotten, and full of the holes made by woodpeckers.

The bear came slowly up to the spot where the monsieur had been seated, and began smelling around.

The Frenchman, for the first time, began to realize that he was hungry, and so he took out his meat and began to eat it, taking care not to attract the notice of the huge bear.

Five minutes passed and then the Frenchman happened to cast his eyes upon the bear. A shrill cry of rage came from his lips as he saw Bruin rolling his precious case around, and trying to break it open. His unfinished dinner dropped to the ground, and he yelled at the bear with all his might, using all the French words he could manage to get out, and mingling them with English in a terrible way.

This jargon had no more effect on Bruin than a fly would.

He took a look at the speaker, as if astonished to hear such a jumbling of languages, and then proceeded with his fun, as he deemed the rolling the case around, but to the little naturalist it was agony.

Suddenly the other bethought himself of his revolver.

Drawing it out, he took aim at the big bear and fired.

Again and again he shot, and at length the little pistol was empty.

The effect upon the bear was about the same as a small load of shot would have been. The bullets drew blood but they did not disable the bear in the least.

They hurt, however, and the bear made a dash at the tree in which his enemy was seated, and began to ascend.

The naturalist, seeing that it would not do to stay where he was, seized hold of a limb above him, and pulled himself up.

Up, up he went, the bear following after, in a great rage. Yard after yard was passed over, and the little man was near to the top of the tree.

He glanced nervously about him, but there seemed to be no escape.

He was on the last limb, and above him was the dead trunk of the tree, and the half-dead limb which stretched out on the bare side of the tree.

What could he do? It certainly looked as though his last moment had come. The bear was just below him and in another moment would be up with him.

It was just at this critical moment that our friends came in sight of the tree, although a good distance off.

At first they knew not what to make of what they saw.

The naturalist was in plain sight, but the bear was on the other side of the tree, and in among the branches, therefore they did not see him.

While they were wondering what was the cause of the little man's strange actions, they caught sight of the bear.

They knew at once what was the matter.

"Heavens, the French Parley Voo is gone up. We can't never git a crack at the varmint, an' the moonseer is bound to be caught, 'less he jumps off, an' that's certain death. Look thar; did ye ever see the beat o' that fur coolness? The cuss is a-straddlin' the limb, an' workin' his way out, a-holdin' the umbrella above his head, to keep the sun off. I'd go my bottom dollar on him fur pluck."

It was indeed true. Monsieur Tierney was sitting on the half-dead limb, and edging his way out toward the end of it.

Above his head he held his huge umbrella, as if to keep shady.

In the eyes of the three friends it was the very essence of pluck.

The bear was creeping slowly and cautiously after him, stopping now and then to look around it. Once, it tried to go back, but it found it was no go, and that it was easier to go forward, so it kept on, thinking, probably, that it could go where the naturalist could.

It was a strange and fearful sight.

They were about eighty feet above the earth and as it seemed, only a piece of rotten wood between the Frenchman and eternity.

The three men thought that their comrade was only showing his recklessness, when he raised his umbrella, as if to keep the sun off.

They did not think that he was following out a brilliant idea, which at the last moment had flashed into his mind.

The bear kept crawling out, and as the Frenchman had to keep out of his reach, he had to keep edging away until at length he was as far as he dared to go.

Then, greatly to the surprise of his friends, he rose to his feet, holding onto the handle of his umbrella with both hands.

What was he about to do?

This question which the three asked themselves did not remain long unanswered, for the Frenchman began to move.

"Look at the pesky leetle cuss. He's dancing on the limb, by the highfalutin' gimcracks. He's tryin' ter bu'st it, I— Thar she goes! He's a dead man, by Heavens!" said Ralph.

The Frenchman had by his jumping broken the limb, and like a flash both bear and limb came to the ground, the former killed and the latter broken into a thousand pieces.

The three men followed the large body in its descent with their eyes.

That the naturalist was dead, they felt certain. He could never survive that fall.

The three men looked at the body on the ground, but, to their surprise, could see no Frenchman.

Where could he be? He could not have saved himself by catching hold of any of the branches, for there were none on that side of the tree.

Barry, convulsed with laughter, which seemed very strangely out of place, pointed up into the air, as if to explain his untimely mirth.

The others looked, and instantly the expression on their faces changed from the serious to the comic. And no wonder. There was the light little naturalist coming down, sailing slowly and majestically toward the ground,

and holding with both hands to his large umbrella.

His brilliant idea had proved a success.

CHAPTER XV.

WHY RALPH WAS CALLED THE "HUNTER HERCULES."

How the naturalist happened to think of this very extraordinary idea, none of the others knew. They saw, however, that it had proved a success, and that was enough just then.

Monsieur Tierney was not hurt in the least, for the big umbrella had let him down as softly as though it had just been made for that purpose. The three others soon had hold of the Frenchman, but they could not hold him long.

Breaking away, he rushed over to where his case lay, and opening it, he began to laugh with joy when he found the precious herb just as he had left it. The guide soon explained the curious (to the young hunter and Barry) antics of his patron.

"Ye see, boys, he cum out to find an 'arb that he sed would make him famous, an' I guess he's found it. Ye must excuse him, for ye know he's only a Parley Voo, frog-eating Frenchman."

At length they managed to get the "mounseer," as Ralph called the naturalist, over to where the fire was burning.

The guide cut off the choice portions of the defunct bear, and then followed them. The naturalist held his case under his arm, as if it was a loving friend; and, in truth, was it not?

Did it not contain that which was a mine of wealth to the "mounseer?" The Frenchman was right in guarding the case closely.

Already he saw in his mind the astonishment and joy of the renowned professors, whose equal he was to become, and the chagrin and rage of his hated rival, when he appeared once more in Paris, bringing the precious and long-sought-for herb.

While the Frenchman was sitting at the foot of a tree, doting upon his treasure, the others were lounging around the fire.

All at once a thought struck Chauncy, and he turned to the guide who lay near the fire smoking his pipe with evident relish.

"Ralph," said he, "I've a favor to ask of you. My father told me that you was called the *Hunter Hercules* by the Indians and hunters, but refused to tell me the story. He told me to ask you to give it, and I do so now. Come, toe the mark, old boy, and begin."

"Wal, boy, I might az well come to the scratch, I see, for ye're bound to hev it out o' me, an' az it ain't a very big yarn, though a true one. The kurnel, or major, I forget which he is now, boy, but I mean yer daddy, always said that the name was very appropriate, an' I acknowledge myself that I am some on the lift, in fact I never seen my equal. Wait till I get in a fight, an' then I'll show ye how I came to git the name. But ye want to know how I got the name on me first. Wal, then, I lay myself out to it an' begin."

"Ye see I haven't always been a hunter an' a trapper, a guide an' an army scout. I used to be a merchant once, and was pretty well off,

but a blarsted feller az I took in az a pardner, he run off wid everything he c'u'd lay hands on, an' left me ter pay the debts, an' to do this I had to sell everything.

"Seen' az a feller widout money couldn't get on very well in the city, I started for the prairies, an' for the last twenty years I have been out West. I made a heap o' money at the gold-mines in California, an' I might go to the East now if I wanted, an' live like a gentleman. But to go on wid my yarn.

"Ye see, I j'ined teams wid an old hunter, an' for a cupple o' years we roamed over the prairies, a-huntin', trappin' an' doin' a little o' Injin-fightin'.

"My chum, a feller named Buck Rawson, hed never me seen in a hand-to-hand fight, an' so he didn't think I was much.

"One time we were up at Fort Laramie, an' it war there that I got the name ye talk about. There was a strappin' big feller, a head taller than me, an' he was reckoned more than a match for any feller in the fort, an' there war some well-known Injin-fighters around at that time too. This feller war az big a bully az ever I seen, an' the way he made soldiers, miners, hunters an' reds obey him would have made any one believe that he war the kurnel that had command o' the fort.

"He had a terrible fist on him, and was reckoned a dead fighter. I always had been a well-known wrestler an' a very strong man, an' the very minnit I set eyes on this 'Red' Lawson, I resolved that he wouldn't come any o' his tricks over 'yours truly.'

"If he tried it on me, he'd find himself in hot water an' there would be a fight, for I had made up my mind to go for him. Some of the hunters an' trappers knew Buck an' me, and we war not long in gettin' rid o' our pelts.

"The fort warn't much then; a sorter tradin'-post, wid a few blue-coats in it, so ye see this 'Red' Lawson had it just his own way. I made up my mind that he had had his way long enough, an' that I would be the one that was to polish him off.

"Buck Rawson war the feller that could give ye a good description o' that fight, but, poor feller, he's rubbed out. Got shot by a cussed Navajo, while we were rescuing a woman from 'em.

"Wal, the way the fight come about, war az follows:

"The second day after I arrived at the fort, I war goin' along the street, where the log hut air, when I heard a woman squeal. That is a sound I never could resist. If a woman yelled for help, an' certain death stared me in the face, I would always run to the rescue. The sound came from a log hut, an' I dashed open the door an' rushed in. There, in the middle o' the only room it contained, was that villain, 'Red' Lawson, a-tryin' to kiss a pretty woman, while her husband, scared e'en'most out o' his life, stood lookin' on. That man war wuss nor a coward.

"A coward will always fight for one he loves, but this baby just stood an' looked on, while the ruffian tried to kiss his wife, too scared to raise a hand in her behalf.

"Wid one blow I knocked the feller senseless,

an' ye may be sure that blow war a pretty hard one. It cum straight from the shoulder, an' them kind o' blows are generally killing.

"I dragged him out o' the house and left him in the street, an' wid the thauks o' the pretty woman yet in my ears, I walked off. Thet afternoon Buck came rushin' inter the hut we occupied.

"Jewhilikens!" sez he, nearly out o' breath; 'thar's goin' to be great doin's byur this evenin'. Some foolish cuss went for 'Red' Lawson, an' he's goin' to keelhaul him this evenin'. He'll do it too, I b'lieve, for he's in a terrible rage."

"Do yer know who the man is?" I asked.

"No," sed he.

"I do," sez I.

"Ye do. Who is it?" exclaimed Buck.

"Ralph Bison," I replied, az quietly az I could. Buck instantly wanted me to gather up my traps an' clear out, 'fur,' sez he, 'ye'll never see the light o' another day.' I refused to move a step, an' then Buck told me he would see fair play.

"If," sez he, "'Red' Lawson tries foul play, I'll put an ounce o' lead in his black heart, an' do a good deed."

"Toward evenin' we went out, an' soon I saw 'Red' comin' toward me wid a crowd follerin' him.

"When he got close up he drew a knife and made a rush at me. Nothin' loth, I drew mine, but at the first strike both o' the weapons flew from our hands. We daren't draw our pistols at that short distance, so 'Red' he struck at me wid his fist.

"I dodged, an' giv him a blow behind the ear that kind o' made him see stars an' smell the ground.

"Up he got, an' made another rush at me, but went down ag'in. The third time he closed, thinking that he might lift me up from my feet an' throw me down. Ha! ha! he found himself in az tight an' lovin' a clasp az if a grizzly had hold o' him.

"His breath came in gasps, an' I might have squeezed the life out o' him then an' thar, but I didn't want to kill the crittur.

"Then I astonished the heathens by liftin' the heavy feller above my head an' pitchin' him twenty feet off as though he was a five-pound weight. Thar's a heap o' strength left in these arms yet, though I am well on to fifty-five. Arter that I became known as the *Hunter Hercules*, an' have gone by that name ever since. Now ye've got the yarn, boy, an' though it ain't an all-fired bloody one, like some I could tell ye, but not vouch for, it's true, az fifty fellers az soon it kin swear," and the hunter proceeded to light his pipe, which had gone out during the recital, with a burning brand taken from the fire, near which he sat.

CHAPTER XVI.

DONNA IOLA MEETS THE TRAILERS.

WE will now return to the Donna Iola, whom we have left altogether too long, to follow the fortunes of our hero.

The young girl would have felt very glad had Chauncy but beckoned to her to stop, for then she might at least die at his side. She had conceived a very strong love for her rescuer, and it

was with great reluctance that she separated from him.

How was she to know whether she would ever see him again? More than once she half-resolved to turn back and stay with him in spite of his entreaties.

But then she remembered what Chauncy had said about her finding assistance and coming to rescue him.

Although the hope was not very strong in her breast that she would find her father and his men, yet she could not help thinking that, perhaps, after all, there might be happy days in store for Chauncy and herself.

As long as Chauncy was in sight, she kept turning in the saddle to watch him. Then, when she was out of his sight, she urged the brave horse on still faster.

She was unconsciously following the trail the Indians had made when they made her a captive.

Had she known this, she would have kept on it, knowing that in a day or so she must come up to her father, if he was trailing her up, as she was sure of.

After riding seven or eight miles, she slackened up the speed of her horse and let him walk, for the animal had had quite a sharp run.

Soon she dismounted and walked beside him for nearly a mile, patting him on the neck, and feeling very proud when the noble animal rubbed his velvet muzzle against her cheeks, as he was wont to do to Chauncy. He evidently saw in Iola one whom he might, in some future time, call his mistress.

It was while Iola was walking beside her steed that she suddenly branched off from the trail she had been pursuing, though unconsciously. It was well for her afterward that she was walking when she left the trail, as the reader will soon see.

All day long the lovely Donna rode on in what she believed to be the right direction. Just as night came on she found, to her horror, that she had arrived at the place she had started to ride off from the trail at. She had been riding in a circle all day.

She found plenty of provisions in the bundle which was strapped to the saddle, and made a good supper despite her situation.

She slept that night on the open prairie, with none to watch over her but her Father in heaven. And yet Iola was not one to be easily frightened.

She could not help wondering, however, whether her next night would be passed in the same way.

Long before the sun arose, she was up and off, eating her scanty breakfast as she rode. She knew that she had kept edging toward the right the day before (and this is natural to one not much accustomed to the open plain, where there is hardly any mark to guide one), and to remedy this evil she kept turning a little to the left every now and then.

In this way she managed to go in quite a straight line, but although she did not know it, yet she was heading in the wrong direction, and was going nearly east instead of south.

All day long she rode, keeping a good lookout, but late in the afternoon she felt that it was

fated that she should spend another night alone. When she reached a "motte" of trees she resolved to camp here, as it was a great deal better than the open plain, and there was a cool spring in among the trees, too, and this the Donna and her horse attacked with a vigor which was sharpened by long thirsting.

Upon going to the edge of the grove to see the sunset, she was surprised and somewhat startled to see a band of horsemen coming toward the trees, directly from the west.

Who could they be? This was the question that the Donna asked herself, as her eyes first fell upon them.

Friends or foes, which?

She resolved to be ready for any emergency, however, and putting the saddle on the horse again she mounted him, and waited on the edge of the trees, anxious to know who the horsemen were. She had no fears of being captured, even should they prove to be Comanches. Her horse, though tired, could not be in a worse condition than those of the band coming toward her, and she could keep ahead of them until darkness came on, which would not be long, for it was already getting dusk.

As the band of horsemen came closer, the Donna saw one thing, and that was: *they were following her trail.*

This made her feel that they were her enemies, the Comanches, for what would her father and his men be doing away out here?

They would follow the trail left by Red Buffalo and his warriors when they had the Donna a captive.

The Donna could see one man dismount as dusk came on, and follow up her trail on foot, one of his comrades leading his horse by the bridle. Iola would have fled at once, but it seemed to her as though the men were not naked from the waist up.

The band were hardly distinguishable as they rode up to the "motte." It was evident that they intended to encamp in the trees.

As they drew near, Iola heard one of them speak, and to her intense delight the words were not spoken in the Comanche tongue, but in fluent Mexican.

"Senor," said the voice, coming from the dismounted trailer, "we will have to rest here until the moon rises. Then we will take up the trail again, and follow it all night if necessary."

"You are right, Alvarez, we will follow it as long as possible. We know that at the end of this trail is your mistress, and that end *must* be reached," said a voice, that made the Donna start, and with a sobbing cry dash out.

The next moment she was in the arms of her father, Don Carlos, and the *vaqueros* and peons, brave men, every one of them, were crowding around her. A fire was soon lighted, and, over a hearty supper, Donna Iola related her adventures to her father. He agreed with her when she said that an effort *must* be made to rescue Chauncy from the Comanches, and when he related what the brave young man had done, the men (there were thirty of them) all signified their approval of his decision. They loved the Donna, and any one that had twice saved her from death, at the risk of his own life, must not be forgotten.

The Donna soon learned how she came to be tracked.

The men had come to where she left the trail early that morning, in fact, just after she was out of sight.

The trailer, Alvarez, after the Don had recognized the tracks of the Donna's feet, soon found out the true state of affairs.

He knew that the Donna had made a circuit, and had camped on the spot. He also knew that the fresh marks was the trail for them to follow. It was very lucky that the Donna had happened to be on foot when she left the main trail; otherwise the trackers would never have suspected who rode the horse, the hoof-marks of which they would have seen.

The Donna slept that night in security, and early the next morning the whole band took the back trail.

That night they camped on the spot where Iola had left the Indian trail, and where she had camped two nights before.

The next day they took up the trail, and when night overtook them, they were not many miles from the river, on the bank of which our hero and his three friends were encamped, and where Monsieur Tierney had that day performed his exploit with the umbrella.

The moon arose, and as it lit up the earth, the band, who were in a clump of trees, heard the noise of a fight, just behind another small grove about a mile distant. The yells of the Comanches and the hurrahs of white men could be plainly heard.

Common humanity prompted Don Carlos to leave the Donna in charge of a man, and to go to the aid of the whites.

But it was something more that made Iola hurry the men off. She had a presentiment that her lover was one of the whites, and that he was in a pretty bad fix and needed aid.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STERN CHASE IS GENERALLY A LONG ONE.

AFTER Ralph had finished his yarn, the whites sat for some time talking around the fire.

The afternoon began to rapidly draw to a close, and darkness was soon at hand. The sky was clear of clouds, and all knew when the moon *did* rise, it would have a clear field before it. The day had been pretty warm, but night brought cool and very pleasant breezes with it. The birds had all gone to their nests or were asleep in the branches of the trees with their heads underneath their wings. The animals which were generally seen in the daytime were all gone now, and the many voices of the night were the only things to be heard.

From the trees came the shrill scream of the panther, the lonely hoot of the owl, the scream of the night-hawk and cries from other animals and birds. From the plains came the howls of the wolves, sounding dismally through the darkness of the night. From the river came the croaking of frogs and the buzzing of many insects that infest watery places.

All were accustomed to these night noises, and did not notice them in the least. They were listening to the guide, who was telling a splendid story about "Kit Carson on the war-path," and how he avenged the death of a poor settler.

The hunter was an old friend of Ralph's and many a time had these two hunted together on the plains.

The three others were listening with great interest, for the yarn (and it was a true one) was a very wild one, and well calculated to make the hearers feel an intense interest in it.

All at once, while in the middle of a sentence, the guide stopped, and held up his hand for the others to remain quiet. He had heard some noise that sounded suspicious.

What it was none of the others knew just then, but they watched the hunter as with head on one side he sat listening.

They wondered what noise the old hunter had heard, but in fact it was *not* a noise that he heard but the sudden stoppage of one which had been sounding in his ears since darkness had set in.

The wolves on the burnt plain, on the opposite side of the river, had *suddenly stopped howling*. To any of the others, this incident would not have meant anything even had they noticed it, which is very doubtful. But to an old hunter and Indian-fighter it meant a good deal. The wolves would never stop howling unless some human being was near them. Therefore Ralph was listening for some sound which would tell whether there were men on the other side of the river or not. He did not have long to wait.

A sound came to their ears, even though the wind was *not* coming from the river to them, that even the Frenchman heard, although of course he did not know what made it.

The sound which all heard was like that made by a crowd of horses or buffaloes, but the old hunter knew that every one of those horses had a rider upon its back. At first he thought it must be Red Buffalo and the remnant of his band returning to the river after the fire to see if the whites had escaped or been burned up.

He soon knew, however, that the noise was a great deal too heavy to be made by the Comanche chief and the few men who had escaped with him. Whoever it was coming, there were scores of horses, as the old hunter knew by his natural sharpness.

Like a flash he sprung to his feet and stamped upon the fire. The young hunter, and the circus-rider were not backward in following his example, and the fire was soon extinguished, to the last spark.

And now the question was had those who were coming seen the fire?

A loud yell, unmistakably pure Comanche, came to their ears. This startled the whites for three reasons, the first of which was that they had no thought of being pursued by a large body of their sworn enemies. Secondly, their foes were nearer than they had taken them to be, and, thirdly, they had seen the fire before it was put out. In fact, it had been a beacon for them for nearly half an hour.

"Onto yer horses, boys. We've got to race for it ag'in, an' the devil take the hindmost." The four sprung to their horses and quickly placed the saddles upon them. While they were adjusting the girths the bright moon, full and clear, peeped up above the eastern horizon, and lighted up the plain and the river.

Then, our four friends saw where the Co-

manches were and what their number was. They were just on the edge of the river, and were about to dash into the water as the moon showed her smiling face.

There were five score of horses, but only half that number of Indians. Each man had a spare horse, which he led by the lariat.

This sight made the guide feel very anxious, for should their horses get tired they had no others to change to, while the Indians could mount their spare horses, and they being nearly fresh would gain rapidly upon the whites. As the four leaped upon their horses the Indians dashed into the water and came rapidly across.

Our friends rode off at as rapid a rate as they could through the forest. Three minutes afterward the band of Comanches emerged from the water and rode after them.

When the Indians reached the plain the four whites were in full view, and giving a war-cry they started in pursuit.

At the head of the warriors rode Red Buffalo, the chief.

He and the warriors who had escaped with him had met a large band after they had set the prairie on fire.

This was the band the chief before leaving the village had ordered to follow after them. They brought spare horses with them, and the chief, who did not feel sure that the fire had done the work he had intended it to do, resolved that, after the ground became perfectly cool, he would set out for the river. He knew that if his enemies had escaped they would be somewhere in this vicinity, and even if he did not find them he could find their trail. The Indians had come in sight of the fire, and had they not had spare horses they would have tried to sneak up onto their enemies. As it was they knew that they could catch up with them anyhow, and so they resolved to have a race.

Away they went over the treeless plain.

Not a rock, nor a tree, nor a mound was in sight; all was one boundless open plain.

The Indians were now in their glory, and they rode along yelling and howling in their fiendish glee. They felt sure of their foes now, and could afford to yell a little.

As to the chief, he rode along in silence, although he was even more rejoiced than any of his warriors. Was not his sworn enemy, the Hunter Hercules, in front of him, and was there not every chance of his being captured or killed? The chief knew the hunter well, and he was well aware that in the hand-to-hand fight that must occur, many would go down beneath the iron arm of the hunter before he was rubbed out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RED BUFFALO MEETS HIS FATE.

THE fugitives were slowly but surely losing ground, and so they urged their horses to the utmost. For the next mile they managed to keep up the distance between them and their pursuers.

At a word from Red Buffalo the Comanches slid onto their spare horses, and *then* the gain was plainly seen by both parties.

And now, away ahead the old hunter spies

trees, and his object is to reach these if possible. There a stand can be made with a little chance of success, whereas, out on the open plain, they would be sure in the end to go under, though there would be a terrible struggle made before that could happen.

Again and again the three who rode mustangs kicked their heels into the sides of their small but game steeds, and the latter exerted every muscle and sinew to increase their speed.

Barry Le Clare could have easily distanced the Comanches on his noble white horse, Snow Cloud, but he was as brave a man as the sun ever shone upon. Never would he leave his comrade in danger. No, rather than do that he would suffer a dozen deaths.

His nature was a noble one, and when a man with his will resolved to do anything, that thing was surely done.

He knew that it was his duty to stay by his comrades, and die with them if necessary, and his mind was made up to do it.

To tell the truth, he had no idea of running away.

The race was coming to a termination, for the whites were being overtaken, hand over hand. The trees were some distance off, and Ralph saw that the Indians would be up with them before they could reach the "motte" of timber beyond.

He resolves, however, to get as near to the trees as possible, and then to make a stand. It would then be "hilt to hilt." What would be the issue? Were the four whites doomed to a horrible death?

The next fifteen minutes would decide their fate.

It looked very much as though they would never see another day, for ten to one, nay twelve to one, was more than enough to lay them out. The Indians now saw what the whites were aiming for, and they increased their speed so as to come up with them before the trees were reached. Both the horses that the Comanches led, and those that they rode were tired now, and had the fugitives only had fresh ones to mount they could have easily ridden away.

But the three mustangs were even more tired than those of the Indians, and at length Ralph saw that they must make a stand.

They were within a hundred yards of the trees, but the leading Comanches were up to them.

A word to his comrade sufficed to let them know his intentions, and then like a flash the whole four suddenly stopped in their wild career. Their rifles were discharged without lifting them to their shoulders.

There was no time to do this. Every second was precious to the whites, and every one must be used in diminishing the number of their foes. Every one of the rifle bullets proved to hold a life in it.

Three warriors the nearest to them received the balls in their breasts, and with screams that were heard above the howls and yells of their comrades, they threw up their arms wildly above their heads, and letting their weapons drop to the ground, they slipped from their horses, and followed after them.

Giving his rifle a whirl around his head, the old hunter let it fly at one of his enemies. The In-

dian saw it coming and quickly dodged. He thus escaped a hard blow, but although the heavy rifle missed the one it was aimed at, yet it did its work.

An Indian behind the one aimed at received it full in his breast, and he fell backward from his horse, pulling a comrade with him.

As the hunter threw his gun, the right arm of Monsieur Tierney was extended, and a faint crack was heard by his comrades.

The Indians heard nothing, but they saw a little cloud of smoke, and also saw a comrade fall heavily from his horse.

Again the tiny revolver sounds the death-warrant of an Indian, and by this time the others had their pistols out.

Crack! crack! crack! they went, sounding high and clear above the noise of the combat. Again the deadly revolvers flashed out fire, smoke, and lead. Again the Indians recoiled before this deadly fire.

Then with a yell of rage that rolled hoarsely along the plain, they dashed forward, and the fight became a general hand-to-hand struggle.

The cracking of the revolvers scared the Indians for a time, but at length these gave out. As they did so, the whites threw them at their foes, knocking several from their saddles with these missiles.

The ones knocked over got upon their feet again, but one and all had badly damaged faces.

And now the combat was hand to hand, hilt to hilt.

Which of the two parties will prove victorious and which will come out of the small end of the horn.

The knives of the three men were out, and in full play.

The little naturalist was using his heavy umbrella with good effect. This was a novel weapon to the Indians, and they are generally afraid of anything new, even though it is not deadly.

Therefore they kept as far away from the "monsieur" as they possibly could. He managed to knock at least half a dozen from their horses, however, and began to get so excited that he broke into a torrent of French words.

His tongue ran on like a machine, freshly greased, and the Indians looked with wonder upon him. They thought that all persons who talked so much were either women or cowards.

Yet there was a brave man who could beat any talker they had ever seen. At every blow he gave a shrill yell, and then went to work again with both his umbrella and his tongue.

As to the knives which the other three carried, the Indians were used to them, and they pressed our friends pretty closely.

The chief, Red Buffalo, was trying hard to get at the old hunter, and the latter nothing loth, was not trying to keep out of his way. At length the two came together, and the old hunter decided that then and there he would put an end to Red Buffalo, even though he was doomed to die the next moment.

Both carried knives, and as they came together, they raised them to strike. The Indian chief had mingled a great deal with the whites, and had learned many of their customs.

Among others, he had learned how to use a knife in quite a skillful manner, and now the hunter saw that he had no mean antagonist to deal with. Blow after blow followed in quick succession, and the others all stopped fighting to witness the struggle between the two leaders.

The Indian chief knew the power of his enemy's arm, and he took care not to get within reach of it.

If the hunter ever clasped him in his arms, he would crush the life out of him, as easily as a grizzly bear.

Red Buffalo had, many a time heard of the great strength of the renowned Hunter Hercules, and he had seen some of his exploits himself, therefore he was pretty well acquainted with the latter's mode of squeezing his enemy to death.

The chief thought that he was a match for the hunter with his knife, but soon the other whites saw that their comrade was just fooling with the Comanche.

Clash, went the knives against each other. Steel hit upon steel, and as if he was being beaten, the hunter went back a little.

He guided his horse with his knees, and the intelligent animal knew just which way its master wished it to go.

The chief, thinking that he was about to be the victor, gave a yell of triumph, and pressed his enemy more closely.

A grim smile lit up the rugged face of the hunter.

A dozen times he could have given the *coup de grace*, but he wanted to keep up the fight as long as possible, for he wanted to give his comrades a rest.

As for himself, there was no tiring him out. His muscles were like iron, and he could outlast any two men.

Again and again the Indian sought to put his knife into the hunter's breast, but each time he was foiled by the latter, who easily warded off the fierce blows.

Had the Indian been an experienced fighter he would never have left his breast unguarded when he lunged out so fiercely. Even the horses of the two mortal foes seemed to hate each other, for they hit and kicked at each other, and reared up in their rage. At length, Ralph resolved to end the fight.

Just then he heard a shout of warning from one of his comrades. A hasty glance over his shoulder served to show him the cause of it. Three Indians were hastening to the aid of their chief. The hunter resolved that they should come up too late. A loud, terrible hurrah pealed forth from their lips, and like a thunderbolt he came upon the chief.

The latter's attempt to guard off the deadly blows that were rained down upon him were useless.

A heavy blow from the hunter's knife gave him a quietus, and like a stricken hog, he gave a grunt, and fell from his horse, stone dead.

Another yell came from Ralph as he turned, and in a moment he was upon the three warriors, who were coming to the aid of their chief. His knife pierced the breast of one of them, and he fell from his steed with the deadly blade in his body.

The Comanches saw that the hunter was now

unarmed, and they thought they could easily kill him now.

Never were men more entirely mistaken in their lives.

Seizing hold of one of them he pulled him from his horse.

Then all saw that the man had been rightly named the Hunter Hercules. With what seemed to be a slight effort to what he was capable of making, he raised the heavy Indian above his head, and after balancing him a couple of seconds, sent him forward with a velocity that man had never seen before. It seemed as though he had been shot from the mouth of a cannon. The second Indian was struck in the breast by the first, and he was knocked a dozen feet from his horse.

Barry could not help thinking what a star the hunter would make in a circus.

CHAPTER XIX.

HILT TO HILT AND FACE TO FACE.

As the Comanches saw their leader fall, they uttered a thundering yell of rage, and came like a thunderbolt against the little band of whites. This was echoed by a chorus of hurrahs from the trappers, and they went at it again.

There was no holding back on the part of the Comanches now.

They no longer cared for the Frenchman and his famous umbrella.

On they came, yelling like so many fiends, and the last spark of hope died out of the breasts of our friends, as they looked upon the ferocious crowd of howling demons.

There was not a spark of mercy in those gleaming, blood-shot eyes; no, all of that (if there ever had been any, which is extremely doubtful), had died out with the death of their chief, Red Buffalo.

The old hunter had seized a knife and was now beside his three comrades. Any one, upon looking at these men sitting on their horses so quietly, would have thought that they were so terror-stricken that they could not move.

But let him take a glance at their faces, and then he sees that which makes him confess at once that his former conviction was utterly false. In those flashing eyes, firmly-set teeth, and stern-looking faces he would read their determination.

If it was fated that they should die, then at least they would go on fighting bravely. The Comanches did not like the appearance of the four hunters in front of them.

They looked like men in a desperate strait, who would fight for their lives like lions, and the Indians felt a little of their courage oozing out of their finger-ends, as they gazed upon them.

But they had gone too far now to hesitate, and so with horrible yells, given to help keep their courage up, they mingled with the four whites.

Then began a combat which could only end in defeat to one of the two contesting parties. None of those who were fighting, had even a thought that the whites would get off.

The Frenchman was separated from the rest

and was valiantly defending himself from the fierce attack of several of the Indians.

His umbrella was whirling around his head, and now and then coming against the head of an Indian with stunning force.

The other three were together, and plying their knives with vigor on their dusky assailants.

More than one of the fierce, and bloodthirsty Indians went down before the iron arm of the Hunter Hercules, and yet despite all of his valorous deeds, it seemed as though the four whites must go under at last. There was not a single chance for them to escape (as far as they or the Comanches could see,) and they had already made up their minds to it.

Ralph had one consolation, however, and that was the fact that if he did have to give up the ghost, he had slain his hated enemy, Red Buffalo, first. To the old hunter this was a great thing, and he gloried in the fact that the Comanche chieftain had bit the dust with *his* knife in his heart.

It seemed too bad on the part of the little Frenchman that he should be killed just as he had found the wonderful herb and accomplished the daring object of his life.

But Monsieur Tierny was game to the backbone, and not a word came from his lips as he fought on with stubborn bravery.

The guide had, upon first sight, taken the Frenchman to be a city chap, who would run at sight of a timid deer.

Now he found how greatly he had been mistaken.

He cast several admiring glances over to where the gallant foreigner fought, and at length, seeing how the other was being pressed by his foes, he fought his way over to him, and with his strong arm, stood and fought beside him.

Although every one of the four whites fought with terrible ferociousness, dealing blow after blow with savage earnestness, yet the odds were too great. The arms of three of them began to ache.

Barry Le Clare and Chauncy had both received a few slight wounds, but as yet none of the whites had been hurt very much.

Horror of horrors; would this terrible strife never come to an end? Would the Indians ever put an end to it by killing their opponents, or by fleeing themselves?

As to the latter, there was no chance of their doing that. Comanches were never known to leave a foe when he was in their power, and it was not at all likely that they would do so in the present instance.

It seemed to the tired whites as though the combat had been going on for hours, and yet all that has been told in this and the preceding chapter, happened in the course of thirty minutes.

There was one thing that the Comanches saw, and that was, that their enemies would *never* be captured alive.

Knowing this, they made no effort to take them, but did every thing they could possibly think of, to kill them.

When Comanches can not get prisoners to torture, they are very well satisfied with scalps.

And now they concentrated their forces for a grand and final rush, which would cut down all of the whites.

The latter knew what was coming, and braced themselves for the coming struggle.

They were all together now, and with heaving breasts and determined countenances they awaited the event, holding their weapons in readiness. They knew that in five minutes more they would be most likely rubbed out, and they only wanted to let daylight into a few more of their dusky foes, before the fight reached its final and fatal termination.

There was no mistaking the scowling faces of the Indians, as with one sharp, quick yell, that meant *business*, they rode forward.

There were still eight to one, and this was too great odds for the whites to have any hope.

Help was nearer than they thought.

There was something in Chauncy's breast that made him think that, after all, they would be saved.

As the Comanches dashed forward, Ralph happened to glance toward the grove of trees which was on the left of the whites, and to his intense joy, saw a large band of horsemen coming out of them, at full, sweeping gallop.

A yell of satisfaction broke from his lips at this sight, and in among the Comanches he went, his huge fists lunging out right and left, and knocking several of the painted devils from their horses. At first the Indians knew not what to make of this. They had expected to do the attacking part, not their enemies. Their sharp ears soon heard the noise made by the approaching horsemen, and turning, they rode off helter-skelter, with cries of surprise and rage.

It was very mortifying to say the least; this being defeated just when the fortune of war seemed about to make them victorious. The horsemen came up to the four whites, but only two stopped. These were Don Carlos and his daughter. The rest swept on after the Indians, and gained upon them, too.

The tables were completely changed now. The Indians were the fugitives, and whites the pursuers.

"Ye just come up in good time, Don Carlos. In five minits we'd 'a' been rubbed out," said the guide.

"Why, how are you, old friend? Give us your hand. How have you been making it lately, Ralph?" said Don.

"Oh, pretty well. How's that, Don?" said Ralph, pointing his thumb over his right shoulder. The Don turned and saw that the young hunter had Donna Lola in his arms.

"It seems to have gone too far to be stopped, even did I wish it. Who is the young fellow, Ralph?" said the young girl's father.

"He's the son o' an old friend an' comrade o' mine. We fit in the Mexican war together. He's a rich gentleman, an' lives out East. His name is Major Branrare," said Ralph.

"What's that? Branrare, did you say? An uncommon name, and the name of my adopted mother's brother, and I have heard that he was an officer in the Mexican war. If this young fellow should prove to be his son, it will be all right for him. I will speak to him about it as soon as possible," said the Don.

CHAPTER XX.

WINDING UP THE TALE.

THE band of horsemen and the Comanches had long since disappeared in the distance.

The moon continued to look down from the clear sky as though smiling with joy at the escape of the whites.

The six rode over to the grove of trees in which the Don and his party had encamped. Chauncy remained with the young girl for over half an hour, and then the Don told him he wanted to speak to him for a few moments.

Reluctantly he tore himself away from the company of Iola, and went with her father. He expected the latter to ask him what his intentions were toward the Donna, and was not surprised in the least when he said.

"Ralph, here, tells me that you are the son of Major Branrare. Is it so?"

Chauncy at once replied in the affirmative.

"Did you ever hear your uncle, Henry Montgomery, who married your father's sister, speak of his adopted son?" asked the Don.

"Hundreds of times," replied Chauncy; "and it is to hunt for him that I am out on the plains. Several things, among which is your name and your knowledge of family matters, which I had not noticed before, now make me think that I have accidentally come across him. How is it?"

"You are right. But first tell me how my father, for such I own him to be, is?" said the Don.

"Both he and his wife are dead. His last words were about you," was Chauncy's reply.

"Heavens, is it true? I knew that mother was dead, but my adopted father? Did he forgive me before he died?" asked the Don, in a voice choked with emotion.

"He did, and also told me that he found out too late that you had just cause to run away from home. He bequeathed you two-thirds of his fortune," said the young man.

The two relatives, by adoption, talked for some time.

Then all in the camp but one, who stood guard went to sleep.

About an hour or so before daybreak, a tramping of hoofs aroused them, and they got to their feet just in time to see their friends coming up.

The Comanche band had been entirely demolished. Not half a dozen of the red-skins had escaped the fury of the brave *vaqueros* and peons.

They now came back, bringing a drove of nearly sixty-five horses, which with their lassoes—which they knew how to handle superbly—they had captured.

The next morning the whole band set out for the hacienda of Don Carlos. They were three days in making it as they took their time to it.

While resting here, the circus-rider gave a performance, and made the Mexican *vaqueros*, who ride splendidly themselves, open their eyes with wonder and admiration.

They had never seen such riding before, and it was in vain that they tried to imitate it.

Notwithstanding all of their natural sharpness and their life on horseback, they could not do what the rider Barry Le Clare did on his famous horse Snow Cloud.

The little Frenchman was anxious to get back to "La Belle France" with his renowned herb,

and he and the guide soon took leave of the others.

Ralph promised that he would fix up his affairs in the West and come East to live with his old chum, Major Branrare. He privately whispered in Chauncy's ear that he would be in New York in time to eat some of the wedding-cake, at which the young man laughed and promised to delay that ceremony, in case he, Ralph, should happen not to get in the city at the given time.

Two weeks afterward, a party left the hacienda for the East. It consisted of Mr. Montgomery, his daughter Iola, Chauncy, Barry Le Clare and a dozen peons as guards.

The hacienda was left in the charge of Alvarez, an old and trusted servant, and the best trail-er in the country.

They intended to come down during a part of every year and spend a month or two at the home which the runaway had made in the wilderness, and in which he had lived for years. He could not bring himself to sell it, and when Chauncy saw what a lovely place it was, his advice was against parting with it. The party reached Austin in safety, and here they parted with all but two of the peons.

From New Orleans they took passage in a steamboat up to Cincinnati, and from thence they went by rail to New York.

Chauncy's father, a noble gentleman, welcomed his former friend and adopted brother, warmly.

A fine residence was bought on a fashionable street, and then Mr. Montgomery proceeded to take his ease.

Iola was introduced into the first society, and created quite a sensation. It was acknowledged by all that she was the "belle of the season," and many young gents sought her company. Iola looked upon them with contempt, however. They were not half so handsome as her Chauncy, and she knew that none of them had the courage her affianced possessed.

At length, one bright morning, Ralph Bison arrived, dressed in a handsome suit which quite became him.

With the prairies he left his hunter's language, and now looked and conversed like a perfect gentleman.

The first evening he was in New York he had quite an adventure. Going along a dark street, he saw half a dozen brutal loafers insult a young lady. Ralph took her part and the whole crowd went for him, but the Hunter Hercules proceeded to try his old plan. Catching up one man he hurled him against the others, and left the whole six lying in the gutter, ending up his gallant exploit with escorting the young lady home.

When the time for Chauncy wedding came on, the young man learned to his surprise that Ralph instead of standing as groomsman to him was about to stand as groom.

The double wedding passed off finely.

Ralph acted his part to perfection, and no one looking at the handsome middle-aged gentleman standing at the side of the blushing young girl would have guessed that he was the famous Hunter Hercules.

After the wedding, the two couples, accompanied by Barry, set out for Europe, intending to make the tour.

Chauncy had made the tour several time before, but this time he was really happy.

They finished up with a visit to Paris, for this city ought to be seen last.

The five were looking at some fine picturesque monument and commenting upon it, when a voice behind them drew their attention to the speaker

"*Sacre*," said the person behind them, "it is von great pleasure for me to welcome mine friends to La Belle France. *Mon Dieu*, monsieurs, it is von fine country."

They did not recognize the speaker. He was finely dressed, and had a gold representation of of an herb pinned onto his coat lapel.

"Deuce take it, boys, it's the "MOUNSEER," said Ralph, emphasizing the word, which he could speak as well as any one if he chose; "look at the umbrella." It was the truth.

The stylish gentleman was Monsieur Tierney, now a noted professor. His rival had quit the ranks of the naturalists when he had come home with the wonderful herb, the model of which he wore as an emblem.

He was a rich man now, and still he carried the huge umbrella which had done so much service on the plains.

He took our friends to a magnificent mansion which he owned, and treated them in a sumptuous manner.

He promised to come out in a few years and see them and that wonderful horse, Snow Cloud.

The professor gave a large supper in their honor, and at the table he arose to his feet and gave a toast which brought forth cheers.

"Gentlemen," said the professor, "I have von toast to propose. To von who is a true friend, a brave man and a noble husband. Gentlemen, I drink in honor of de CHAMPION TEXAN RIDER."

THE END.

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